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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"IS THERE ANYTHING THAT I COULD HELP YOU IN?" SAID OLIVE.

## LOVE, THE CONQUEROR.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

##### VERA CARSTAIR'S FIRST RIDE.

"I WISH I could ride," said Vera Carstairs, with a half-dissatisfied frown on her pretty face as she stood at the open window of the breakfast-room at the Rectory watching several equestrians sweeping along the wide hedge-bordered road that ran at the end of the garden. "Papa," she added, resting one firm, well-shaped hand on the window-sill, and turning her head slightly, "papa, why is it that you never had me taught? Agnes rides splendidly now; she told me so in her last letter!"

"My dear Miss Vera, why have you not expressed that wish before? Every horse in my

stable is at your service," said a cool, clear, manly voice, which made the girl start and blush vividly.

"Where did you spring from?" she asked, recovering herself in a moment, and smiling out at the tall, well-built, handsome-faced man who stood before her.

He did not make any reply for the moment, but stood gazing at the pretty picture the girl made in her simple holland gown, her curly brown hair falling carelessly about her graceful shoulders, her brown eyes bright and sparkling with health. A pretty picture, indeed; and the roses that crept all around the wide window making a sweet and fitting frame to that fair girlish face, were not purer in tint and delicacy than the rare pink glow on the rounded cheeks.

"Lost your tongue, Mr. Olive Norton?" she went on, seeing that he did not answer, and not a whit disconcerted by his close scrutiny. She had known the Nortons all her life; and though they were the grand people of Maribury, and she only the younger daughter of the under-

paid, overworked Vicar; yet she never could, and never, in all probability, would feel that she must bow low to them, and, to do them justice, they never showed any desire that she should do so.

"No," he returned, half lazily, but with a laugh. "I was lost in admiration of your sweet self. But you have not accepted my offer. Shall I bring a mare over with me this afternoon?"

"But I do not even know how to get up," was the dismayed response; "besides, who is to teach me? Besides, papa has a horse and—I do not think he would like me to accept, so do not say any more about it." And Vera turned her head that he should not see the tears that had risen to her eyes; for, oh! she had so longed all her life to have a horse to ride on, to feel herself flying, as she had seen the Norton girls, over meadows, leaping ditches, and cantering down the wide, cool, shady lanes that abounded in dear old Maribury.

"Besides, besides, how many more besides?" inquired Olive Norton, with a light laugh. "If

you can rummage up a habit the rest is all plain sailing."

"What is all this earnest talking about?" asked the gentle, kindly voice of the Vicar at his daughter's elbow; and Vera turned, and, twining her supple fingers round his arm, laid her head cooingly on his breast. "What was that I heard about habits and horses, eh, pussie?"

"Oh, papa, Mr. Norton says he will teach me to ride if I can find a habit, and I know where there is one—an old one of dear mamma's. Do let me, papa! I will be so careful!" and the arms crept up round the father's neck till the white head was bent over the bright brown one.

At the mention of the dead wife's name a slight cloud of pain overspread the grave, sensitive features; but the loving father put aside his own feelings, and smiling down at the child who had never seen its mother's face, he returned,—

"You may learn to ride as soon as you like, but Lister is a sorry back for a lady to ride. If I had known of your wish, pet, you should have—"

"Now, papa, if you look like that I shall be sorry that I have made my desire known at all. But Mr. Norton says he will bring one of his own horses over for me; won't that be grand, papa?" and a merry ripple of delight fell from the girl's lips.

"You are very good, young sir," said Mr. Carstairs, with grave, old-fashioned courtesy, "but will Lady Norton and Sir William like it?"

"And why not, pray, Mr. Carstairs?" was the ready retort, though the remark caused a sensation of doubt to flash across his brain. "Well, that is settled then. Shall it be three o'clock?" he added, looking inquiringly at Vera.

"Three o'clock," she assented, with a nod. "By-the-bye, what brought you over here so early? I was so full of myself I forgot that you did not come to listen to my complaints."

"I came to get out of the way of a regular inroad of visitors, both male and female. You ought to have seen me sneaking round the back of the house, keeping well under the shade of the hedges!" was the laughing rejoinder.

"Don't you think it would be as well if you came in?" observed Vera.

"If you will let me come in through the window;" and without waiting for a reply he vaulted lightly into the pleasant, but shabby room. It was quite evident that this was not an unusual proceeding from the half-reproving, yet amused glance of father and daughter.

"Now, Mr. Clive, if you have visitors, how are you going to keep your appointment with me?" asked Vera, taking a seat on the substantial arm of the Vicar's easy chair.

"Don't you see, I can plead a prior engagement!" he said, quaintly; and Vera laughed outright. "It is all very well for you to laugh," he went on, half grumblingly, "but one of those visitors is destined to be the future Lady Norton, and I have never seen her since she wore short frocks and pinafores."

"Poor boy, is it going to be forced into a loveless marriage!" teased Vera; then, with a sudden change of manner and tone, "You must be an idiot, then, and I am sorry for you. Why not steer clear of love or marriage! I mean to!"

"Your remarks are highly complimentary," said Clive, piqued at her manner; "and as for never loving, I've heard lots of girls talk like that, and they always get the fever worse than the others; and, by Jove, I think you'll get it bad when you do get it."

"Indeed! Well, I think so, too, so as that is the case I mean to keep out of love's way;" and Vera tapped her toes on the shabby carpet that once boasted a pattern, to judge by the odd scraps of raised print and yellowed drab in corners where the chairs and side tables stood.

"You must excuse me now, as I have some soup to get ready for old Widow Brown, and papa's luncheon, and, oh! heaps of things to see to!" And without more ceremony Vera tripped away, leaving the vicar and young Clive Norton alone.

"I am selfish enough to hope that she will

keep out of love's way for some time to come," observed the vicar, looking up from his paper and smiling on the young fellow before him. "She is so young—a mere child yet."

"Yes," answered Clive, his blue eyes lighting up with amusement. "She was having a swing the other day when I called. By the bye, Mr. Carstairs, what do you think of the new doctor? I have not seen him yet, but I hear he is a splendid-looking fellow."

"Neither have I seen him, but I intend calling this afternoon, after which you shall have my verdict," replied the Rev. Mr. Carstairs. "And now, young sir, you must excuse me," he went on, rising and holding out his hand. "I see my old cob at the gate," and with a nod he passed out of the room, Clive following at a leisurely pace.

He could hear Vera's voice trilling snatches of song softly as she passed to and from the kitchen and garden, could see the flash of her dress now and again from where he stood; and once he caught a glimpse of the sweet, unconscious face bent over a small bed of fragrant herbs.

"A mere child!" he mused, watching the graceful movements of the slender, supple figure, and a strange feeling of longing and yearning came into his heart. "Yes, but only in thought, and when once the woman's soul is awakened what a depth of passion will be found there! Vera Carstairs," he called aloud, "I am going now. Good-bye till this afternoon."

"You need not have troubled to wait," cried Vera from the garden, "I will be all ready at three. Good-bye!" and then she returned to her labours of gathering herbs for Widow Brown's soup; and Clive Norton had nothing to do but to saunter out into the sunlit, quaint old garden and pursue his homeward way.

At three o'clock precisely Vera stood at the window of her bedroom, which overlooked the front garden, ready equipped for her first ride. The habit fitted to perfection, though it was a trifle old-fashioned in cut and decidedly shabby; but the fair, fresh, girlish face looked fairer than ever with that bright colour born of excitement on the rounded cheeks, that quick glance of delight in the large brown eyes. So thought Clive, as he came quickly up the pathway with its border of close-clipped box; and another thought came unbidden to his mind—"would be passing sweet to have those brown eyes always to welcome him thus, to see them droop beneath his gaze, and then he smiled at the notion. What would his lady mother say to such a match! A Norton, the head of the family, or rather the only son, to wed the penniless daughter of a penniless person! Besides, Vera Carstairs was a child—a mere child of eighteen!"

"Here I am!" he cried cheerily, as the girl leant out of the window, her face dimpling all over with pleasure. "Are you ready?"

"Been ready this half-hour," was the smiling retort; and then she disappeared, only to reappear a few moments later under the trellised porch. "Papa," she called, opening a door that faced that of the breakfast-parlour, "come and see me start. That horse looks a good way up in the world. However am I to get up?"

"Oh, easily enough," was the careless rejoinder. "You just do as I tell you, and you will have no bother."

The three—Mr. Carstairs having joined them—had arrived at the gate by this time, where stood the two horses under the cool, pleasant shade of the wide-spreading chestnuts that screened the garden from the gaze of passers-by.

"What a little beauty!" exclaimed Vera, as she caught a fuller view of the graceful bay that Clive had brought for her—a slender, glossy-skinned creature with a small proud head and arched neck, perfect in every particular.

"Yes, she was first in the Goodwood races last year," said Clive, passing his hand caressingly over the smooth skin. "Now, Miss Vera!"

After several ineffectual attempts Vera mounted half-way where she stuck fast, declaring she would have to try again; but Clive would not hear of that, and so she had to scramble the rest of the way, and at last found herself seated in triumph. They went down the lane slowly, Vera in high glee, and Clive giving instructions as to

how she should sit, &c., and the old doctor gazed lovingly after them, never dreaming that a world of untold shame and sorrow would come to his child through Olive Norton. Well, indeed, that he knew not the future; he could not then have gone back so quietly to his study to finish his sermon.

Half-way down the lane Clive drew rein and asked Vera which route she would prefer—the open road, or the quiet country lanes that abounded in this lovely part of Kent—lanes that partook of the nature of roads, where wide ditches filled with wild flowers, bordered them, and high hedges, white with briony, made a sort of break in the vast stretches of green.

Vera chose the lanes, feeling shy in this, her first appearance on any horse; and then they went on, she prattling away to her heart's content, and he listening in quiet amusement.

Clive Norton was four-and-twenty, and considered himself a kind of elder brother to Vera, who had never been blessed with any of her own; and looking upon Vera as a pretty, innocent child, he never dreamed of danger to himself arising from these rides in the soft hush of the summer noons.

"What kind of a horsewoman do you think I shall make?" asked Vera, looking round at Clive as they turned the corner of a lane which gave on to a broad, white road.

Neither had noticed a party of riders coming at a swift canter towards them, and therefore both were startled when a clear, high-bred voice called out,—

"Ah, Mr. Clive, so you have have turned riding-master?"

Clive flushed slightly, then laughed, but it was an uneasy laugh, for he was wondering what one of the party would think of his refusal to join them, as he had a prior engagement. This one was a tall, majestic-looking girl, or woman, with a pale, haughty, dark-eyed face, and as Vera met the cold glances of those eyes, a chill went through her.

Something in that glance made her think the owner could be cruel, and she inwardly prayed that she might never be an object of anger to this girl with the repellent, lovely face.

The Misses Norton greeted Vera cordially. There was as good blood in the veins of Vera Carstairs as in their own, and the girls being "nice" girls, always made a point of speaking to her, though their father and mother did not approve of the familiarity; it gave people notions above their position!

"You do not know Vera," said Ada, the eldest, turning to the dark-eyed girl with a smile. "Miss Carstairs, Miss Bertram; Miss Bertram, Miss Vera Carstairs."

Adèle Bertram acknowledged the introduction by a cold inclination of her dark head only, and then addressing Clive said, in a clear, cold voice,—

"We will bid you adieu now, Mr. Norton, that is if it is agreeable," and she glanced inquiringly at the others.

"Oh, yes!" cried Alice Norton, a bright-faced, brown-eyed girl of about eighteen. "I am dying for another canter. Good-bye, Vera!"

Miss Bertram smiled at Clive, a smile that utterly altered her whole face, rendering it perfect in its beauty; then, as she bowed to Vera, the cold hauteur chased away the smile, and Vera shuddered. She gave a deep sigh of relief as the party rode swiftly away, and, looking curiously up into Clive's face, asked,—

"Who is that girl, Miss Bertram?"

"That is my bride-elect," returned Clive, and there was a ring of pride in his tones.

Adèle Bertram was a woman whom any man would be proud to see at the head of his table; whether she was a woman to command love—the all-abiding, tender love necessary to perfect wedded life—was a question he had not asked himself as yet.

"Oh!" That was all Vera said. But if he had not been busy with his own thoughts he would have read the epilogue she had formed in that monosyllable. "I think we had better be going home," she went on, after a few moments; "papa will be wanting his tea."



"Very well, I am your most obedient slave," returned Olive, laughing.

"Well, my pet, and how have you enjoyed your first ride?" inquired the Rev. Mr. Carstairs, coming out into the porch on hearing their footsteps on the pathway.

"So much, papa," she cried, merrily. "I did not go more than half-a-yard up in the air when I cantered; did I, Mr. Olive?"

"I assure you Miss Vera speaks truth," he responded, gravely, at which they all laughed. "I must say good-bye, as there is a dinner on up at the Tower, and I must be there, of course," he added, shaking hands with the Vicar and then with Vera. "I shall bring the horse round to-morrow at the same time, so be ready," and then he turned away.

## CHAPTER II.

NEIL ST. CROIX, THE NEW DOCTOR.

THE Rookery was as sweet an old house as one could wish to see, nestling like a fair white bird among tall, dark elms, and covered, all save the roof, by luxuriant vines. A long, narrow stretch of lawn, smooth as velvet, with a straight yellow path on one side, led up to its windows where fragrant mignonette sent out its breath to mingle with the other pleasant odours of the summer air.

Dr. Neil St. Croix, sitting in his snug surgery busily writing, looked as if life had gone well with him. The close-cropped, dark head had a well-satisfied carriage, and the firm, rather large mouth, ornamented but not hidden by the soft, dark moustache, wore a pleasant, easy smile.

Presently he put down his pen and looked out of the window, which, the room being at the rear of the house, commanded an extensive view of the surrounding country, and thus discovered a pair of keen, hazel eyes that had the look of a man accustomed to take in a world of information at a glance—a man quick of perception, proud and determined, proud to a fault, determined with an unwavering determination, yet with a wealth of tenderness lurking somewhere about the face, whether in the eyes or the lines of the mouth was not certain, but it was there—in the face somewhere.

The Rookery was situated in the main street of Marlbury, a street that commenced at the foot of a steep hill, and ended on its brow, and the Rookery lay half-way up the incline.

When Neil St. Croix glanced up from his writing he had no other purpose than to relieve his eyes from the monotony of staring at the paper, but as he was about to continue his occupation, a loud ring made him pause; and, next moment, he was startled by the apparition of a young girl, in a state of terrified excitement.

Vera, for it was she, had been out for a ride, and, on returning, found her father in his study, apparently asleep; but when, on laying her hand on his arm, there was no movement, she felt a vague alarm thrill her, and, raising the white head, found to her horror, that he had either ained or had a fit.

It was the work of a moment to mount Browne, and, Dr. St. Croix being the nearest doctor, ride madly to his house.

"Will you come quickly to the Vicarage, please, Dr. St. Croix? Papa is in a fit or something!" she cried, hurriedly; and Neil, who had risen on her entrance, bowed acquiescence.

"I will be there almost as soon as yourself," he returned, quietly; and, somehow, Vera felt reassured by those grave tones.

She had never before spoken to Neil, though, since his advent in Marlbury, they had often met, and he and her father had become great friends.

He was true to his word. She hardly had time to change her habit before she heard his voice in the hall, and, running hastily down, she led him to her father's room, where he lay, still and motionless, as she had first found him.

Neil St. Croix gave a quick, pitying glance at Vera as he entered, and saw that still, white-haired form, but the girl heeded nothing in her pain and horror.

"Tell me, doctor, what is the matter! Is he dead?" she whispered, in an awe-struck voice, and her pretty face blanched and quivered at the mere thought.

"No," he replied, calmly, "he is in a fit. Whom can I give orders to?" he added, looking round at the old woman, who had been maid and nurse to the two motherless girls.

"I will do all that is to be done," exclaimed Vera, starting forward.

"You are too young," was the quiet reply, given in the tone of command, and Vera instinctively gave way to him. Then he continued, addressing Anna White, "he must be placed in a warm bath at once, and I will send round my boy with some medicine. He is recovering now."

"Papa," whispered Vera, as the old man's eyelids fluttered, "papa, do you know me?"

"Vera," was the slowly spoken response. "I was taken ill, my child; do not be frightened. I shall soon be all right."

Dr. Neil had left the apartment as soon as he saw that his patient was recovering, but he did not leave the house. He went to the study, where, after writing out a prescription, he spoke gravely to the trusted old servant words that sent the colour from her healthy old cheeks, and made her throw up her hands with a gesture expressive of despair.

"My poor motherless bairn! what will she do!" she said.

"Let us hope that the blow will be warded off for some time," he returned, rising. "Good-day, nurse; I shall call in again in the evening to have a chat with the Vicar. Yes, he will be well enough," he added, seeing her look of surprise, and then he went away.

"So I gave you a fright this afternoon, St. Croix!"

It was the Rev. Mr. Carstairs who spoke, and in the same cheery tones of yore; and Vera, who had risen on his entrance, looked up brightly into Neil's face.

"It is all your medicine, doctor!" she said, in girlish enthusiasm.

"And your father's good constitution," he replied.

And then the Vicar rang for more tea, for the things still stood on the table, and invited Neil to be seated.

"Have you leisure enough to stay a little and have a good talk!" asked the Vicar.

"Yes, if you like the infliction of my company. I can stay the evening," was the ready response.

He watched the graceful, girlish figure, as Vera bent over the table preparing his meal, and unconsciously the thought came to him that this girl, with her bright winsome face and perfectly unaffected manner, would make a man's home very homelike; and he began to think that the life of a man like himself was not all that could be desired, that if he had a wife to welcome him when he came in tired from his round of visits in the evening it would be very sweet.

Not that Neil St. Croix had fallen in love at first sight, only the scene of peaceful home comfort they presented, this old man and his young daughter, brought up the vision of his evenings spent in solitude, and it made him think thoughts that were the beginning of falling in love.

After the table had been cleared they drew their chairs near the window, where they could see the white moonlight resting on the fair landscape, and basking the rustling trees in silvery light. That talk with the father and daughter in the moonlight was the commencement of a new era in Neil St. Croix's life; and when he rose to bid them good-night, an unspoken wish was in his heart that the Vicar would permit him often to make unceremonious visits.

Neil St. Croix had been so long in the world of fashion that he had sickened of the frivolity and shallowness of most of its votaries, and the simplicity and refinement of this vicar's daughter came upon him like a revelation. He had admired the natural and sensible manner in which she had given her answers when appealed to in the course of conversation; and as he strolled home down the silent moonlit lane he found himself wondering how those clear brown

eyes would look with the love-light in them; and Vera Carstairs went to bed, and dreamed of a dark, rather stern-faced man, whose voice had such a soothing in its grave tones.

## CHAPTER III.

ADELPH BERTRAM MAKES A MOVE.

UP at Norton Towers there was great gaiety going on. One of the chief things, supposed to be more fashionable and select than balls, was a musical evening once a week, and Dr. St. Croix, being a splendid musician, always made one of the assemblage. He had been in Marlbury nearly two months, and during that time had paid many visits to the Vicarage; and slowly but surely he was placing Vera on the throne of his heart, and it pained him not a little to find that she was not seen oftener at the house of his noble friends.

Still he enjoyed those evenings in the long drawing-room, with its pale, cream-hued furniture, and jardinières and vases of bright, rare blossoms, listening to and joining in with the conversation of these perfectly-cultured people. Though he admired Vera's simplicity, "fashion" still had its charm.

It was an evening in August—early August—when the air is soft and wooing, and laden with the odour of all sweet flowers; and as Neil sauntered along through the green corn-fields on his way to Norton Towers there was an air of satisfaction about him that seemed to indicate that the world was as kind as ever to this young doctor.

These corn-fields led up to the grounds of Norton Towers, and soon Neil had crossed the stile which was the boundary line, and entered the garden in front of the house. Gay voices rang out on the still, evening air; and through the wide-open French windows he could see a number of people, either standing or sitting. It was that half-hour before dinner in which every one gets pleasant and affable in anticipation.

Adèle Bertram, who had been conversing with Olive Norton, turned with a charming smile to the young doctor, saying—

"You are the very last, Dr. St. Croix! You good musicians always like to keep people in suspense."

"Say, rather, we do not like to bore people with our company, when we know it is only what we perform that calls forth an invitation," he retorted, sarcastically.

"Now, doctor, I think you are very unkind. Do you wish to be told your company is appreciated at least by one here!" she replied, with a quick flash of her black eyes.

There was no mistaking her meaning, and yet her marriage with Olive Norton was the talk of the village, for it was fixed to take place in September.

Neil St. Croix had not the key of her mind, therefore he had to take refuge in small talk.

"I was down at the Vicarage last evening," he said, carelessly. "Jolly old fellow, but he cannot live long. I am sorry for Miss Carstairs. It will be an awful blow to her."

"Poor girl!" murmured the cold, clear voice of Adèle. "You are a great admirer of hers, I hear. It is a pity she is such an arrant flirt. It would be so nice for her to get married to some kind, thoughtful man, who would—"

"You must pardon me, Miss Bertram, but I always thought Miss Carstairs a good, thoughtful, girl, who would be calculated to turn a man to be good and useful, who otherwise would only be a frivolous butterfly," replied Neil, gravely, and with a closing of the firm mouth.

"Oh! I did not know you were so very interested in Vera Carstairs, Dr. St. Croix; but every one here knows she loves Olive, while he only cares for her as a brother. See how the silly moth flutters round the candle—those rides, for instance!"

"He is like a brother to her, Miss Bertram," insisted Neil, a slight flush rising to his face.

"You would wish to think so, I see," was the

meaning answer, spoken with a smile, though the dark eyes flashed dangerously.

Neil did not deny the accusation contained in the words, only bowed and moved away as the dinner-bell clanged out, and Olive came to lead his *fiancée* to her place at his side. But though outwardly showing no sign, Neil shrank from those words as a dog does from a blow.

Vera Carstairs a flirt! She in love with Clive, the acknowledged lover of another girl! No; she might have cared for him—Clive—at first; but something seemed to whisper that Vera was too proud to nurse a love unasked and unwished for. Yet the thought rankled, and he went over so many little things that seemed to point to the fact that Vera had loved Clive. Then how unwise to continue those ruses.

He was not in a very pleasant frame of mind after those musings, but he had never played so masterfully, so grandly; and Adèle, sitting watching the proud, stern face of the player, smiled, and told herself that she would get her revenge on this girl for daring to monopolise her lover.

"You and the doctor seem to hit it pretty well," remarked Clive, during a pause in the playing, and Adèle replied with a sweet smile that,—

"We were talking of Vera Carstairs."

It was late when Neil said good-bye to the Norton Towers people, yet he did not go at once to his pretty home. He, instead, struck across a narrow lane which gave entrance to a wide stretch of corn-fields, the corn lying tall and still in the silence of the moonlit night.

A high, old-fashioned stile rising up across his path made him pause, and he stood still, folding his arms over the rough top-bar, and lifting his face to the quiet heavens—so pale and troubled a face, with such a look of deep sorrow in the clear eyes!

"Heaven," he murmured, huskily, "I have learned to love her so in these two short months! Can it be true that she cares for Clive, while I have been fancying, like a big doll, that her eyes grew shy at my approach?"

It was the first time Neil St. Croix had ever really loved. Like all men, he had had his flirtations and his fancies, but this winsome, brown-haired girl, with her frank, maidenly ways, had taken his heart slowly, but surely, from him; and now he was told that she already loved, and that she loved one who cared only for her as a sister, while he—

Then, too, if she—his careless, pure-eyed Vera—loved Clive she could not be the pure thing he had imagined her, for did she not know that Clive Norton would soon be the husband of another woman? He could not understand it, could not reconcile the different ideas; and with a half-sigh, half-groan, he turned, and walked back to his home, which of late had become so dear as the future home of Vera Carstairs.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"I love my love, I love my love,  
Because I know my love loves me!"

VERA CARSTAIRS trilled the words out carelessly, unheeding. Her heart was full of a new sweet melody, and unconsciously it rose to her lips, and found words in that pretty song. Vera knew at last what it was to love, knew the depth of her own soul; and while the strength of the passion she felt for Neil St. Croix startled her, yet it filled her with a shy happiness and wonderment that was very perplexing. She had no mother, no woman to whom she could confide all her hopes and fears; and with a girl's natural timidity she hid all signs from her father, although she loved him so dearly.

It was a lovely day—August is ever a lovely month, but this year he seemed to have borrowed or stolen the warmth of July, and mingled with it the sweet, breezy coolness of August—a lovely day, with the scent of dying roses in the air, the subtle freshness of ripened corn stealing across the meadows, and the tall trees swaying gently to and fro, rocking the merry

birds that paused on their boughs to take breath for another flight and long shrill carol.

Vera looked fair and pure indeed as she bent over her flowers; and Neil, standing at the low, white gate leading from the church, told himself that Vera in her innocence might have grown to love Clive Norton, but she would cast it from her as she would a noxious reptile on learning that he cared for another. He did not see her blush as she glanced up, and did not know that she had seen him, and that the song died on her lips in shy fear that he would guess; he only saw her lift her face, rosy red, as Clive Norton sauntered down the pathway, and a sickening horror and pain took possession of him.

"Gardening!" was the very commonplace remark that Clive made, but Neil did not hear; he only saw that lovely, blushing face turned to that of Clive Norton. Then Clive caught sight of Neil, and called out,—

"Don't stand there as if you were intruding. We are not making love. I am booked, and out of the hunt; so come in, old fellow."

"How condescending! May he really come in!" laughed Vera, blushing more furiously than ever at Clive's words, and not daring to raise her eyes to Neil's.

Ah! Vera, you little know the world of pain and passion in the eyes that are gazing down so straightly at you!

Clive saw the look, and wondered; but he made some light remark upon her gardening, and then said,—

"Will you come for a ride this afternoon? It will be the last before I am married."

Neil, with the poison of Adèle's look and insinuations ranking in his brain, laid a deep meaning to those words, and to Vera's quick look of pleasure.

"Yes," she replied, briskly; "as if there could be any other answer." Then looking up shyly into the young doctor's face, she added, "Did you wish to see papa? He is out now, but he told me to ask you to step in this evening, if you should call."

"I will come over this evening, Miss Carstairs," he responded, coldly, as he turned away.

In his pain and disappointment he did not notice that he had not shaken hands, but the omission sent a cold chill to Vera's heart, and the sweet, smiling mouth quivered. She would not let Clive see that she was hurt; and so, turning abruptly so that her face was hid, she said,—

"You know my habits, Mr. Norton, and will therefore excuse me if I go in now," and he laughed, and said,—

"Of course," and sauntered away.

He wondered what made her so quiet and pale that afternoon as they cantered along the straight country roads, and once asked Vera if she had received any bad news.

"You are so quiet and changed," he said, in explanation. "Is there anything that I could help you in?"

"Nothing. No one can help me," she returned slowly, lifting her eyes to his face, and something in their glance told Clive that the love she had sworn to eschew had come to her, and with the knowledge came a great pity, for he guessed that she was not happy in her love. He did not guess that he was the cause of her unhappiness, did not know that, as he bent towards her in quick sympathy, that Neil St. Croix, driving along the road in his neat brougham, caught a full view of them both, at the sight of whom the blood forsook the dark cheeks, and seemed to take refuge in the dark eyes.

"Their last ride before the wedding!" muttered Neil. "Does the fellow see and know that she loves him!" and then they were lost to view.

When Neil entered the little sitting-room that evening Vera was alone. She had recognised his voice—aye, his footsteps—and a sudden shyness overwhelmed her at the thought of receiving him alone, and she rose, and began to nervously rearrange the flowers that stood on a side table.

"Is that you, doctor?" she asked, coming forward and holding out her hand.

As he took it and held it, gazing down at the fair, girlish face, a tide of passionate love swept

over him, and words of passionate tenderness quivered on his lips, but he held them back. The girl whom he had learned to idolise had no love for him; her heart was given to Clive Norton; or at least had been. He must wait, and perhaps the future years—with a start he remembered that it was not *de rigueur* to stand with a young lady's hand in his while he indulged in dreams, and dropping the slender hand abruptly, he said with a short laugh,—

"Yes, Miss Carstairs, it is I. Do you know that you are a perfect study in brown this evening! Brown hair, eyes and frock?"

"Frock!" echoed Vera, trying to hide her feelings in banter; and just then Mr. Carstairs came in looking feebler, but just as bright and cheerful as of yore, and Vera settled herself in a low chair with a book, but not to read; her mind was in a whirl of painful wonder. Why did Neil look at her with that passionate, loving gaze, and then turn so abruptly from her? Something told her that he loved her, and in the midst of her pain her young heart throbbed with joy at the thought; but why could he not tell his love? Why look so unutterably sad whenever he looked upon her?

"Now, Vera," said the Vicar, turning to his daughter, after a little conversation with the young doctor, "give us some music; sing 'Thy voice is near me in my dreams.'"

Vera would sing in the presence of Clive Norton without being asked, but to go to that little piano and sing with Neil's dark eyes fixed upon her, she felt almost giddy from nervousness as she rose and crossed the room; but once seated, the nervousness left her, and striking the notes with light, firm touch, she played the opening bars, and then plunged into the song.

As is generally the case, Vera had never sung better; and Neil, watching that speaking face, wondered if it were Clive's voice that haunted her, when, as he was turning the pages of her music, she glanced involuntarily up into his face; and the look he saw there in that fleeting moment sent a thrill of joy to his heart, and in that moment he felt that he was loved. She dropped her eyes as suddenly as she had lifted them, her own heart beating wildly at the love she saw written in Neil's eyes.

She sang again, choosing in the exultation of that moment, "I love my love, because I know my love loves me," sang it with such a passion of tenderness that the simple song took a deeper, sweeter meaning; and Neil's heart answered the words, "Because I know my love loves me," while his handsome face grew soft and dreamy, the dark, piercing eyes gentle and misty. Ah! love, love! Why do you carry so bitter a draught for your pupils to quaff!

The moon was up that night, and the Vicar proposed that they should all walk to the doctor's house, and see him safe home. Very different were now his thoughts as Neil walked along the narrow hedge-bordered lanes, with Vera at his side. The girl's face looked very lovely with that sweet womanly expression upon it; Neil saw the new loveliness by the light of the moon, and he raised his head in the stillness, softly breathing a thanksgiving.

No one spoke. In the hearts of two there was the hush of a deep, passionate love that waited to be expressed; and the old man's thoughts had gone back to a night—long, long ago—when he and his gentle girl wife had so walked in the soft white light of the moon—their last walk together. Vera drew a deep, long breath as they turned into the side street, at the corner of which stood Neil St. Croix's home. It seemed to her that with the end of that walk there came an end to this great sweetness that had entered her life. Neil saw the pretty lips draw together with quick pain; and, divining some of her thoughts, wished that he could have but one moment wherein to breathe his love. But he could wait, his hour had come sooner than he had hoped; surely he could be patient now! Only a few hours more, and he would know his fate!

Adèle Bertram, driving home from a ball saw, from her carriage window, the good-night between the young doctor and the clergyman's daughter; saw their tale of deep, true love



written on their quiet, hushed faces, and vowed in her cruel, jealous heart that it should not be. To do her justice, she half believed that Clive cared for Vera, though she knew Vera cared nought for him, but for this very reason she hated her more; and next day, two days before her wedding, she sent Clive to ask Nell St. Croix to pay the Towers a visit, intending to make her second move, since the first had failed.

Vera was to be there also. Poor Vera, you little guessed that you were in the enemy's camp! Nell St. Croix did not arrive until after dinner, when the ladies were grouping themselves in graceful *à-tôtes* and tricos, as though they were not longing for the advent of the gentlemen. Adèle was the first to notice his entrance, and drew her long crimson silk train aside in smiling invitation, and he went to her side.

She lifted those wondrous, fascinating eyes to his face as he bent over her; and Vera, turning at that moment, felt as though a knife had been thrust through her bosom. Was he a flirt! Could he look like he had looked last night upon any woman? He did not appear to have noticed her standing at a window at the far end of the room; but he had seen her and was longing to go to her, to see her eyes light up with the glow he had seen in them the night before, to hear the clear, girlish voice greet him; but Adèle was a woman of the world, and having made a plan knew how to carry it out.

She watched Clive's face as he entered the room, and that ugly, cold glitter came into her eyes, as she saw him glance round, and then go to where Vera stood; but she smiled and looked up at Nell, saying softly,—

"He is very kind to her and tries to show her that he cares for her as a brother."

"I think she does not need any showing," he returned, coldly.

Later on Clive made his way to his bride elect's side, bending his handsome, curly head to whisper,—

"Adèle, I have been wanting a few words with my love ever so long, and I thought you would never be alone, dearest."

She glanced up quickly into his face, her own lighting up with passionate joy at his tone, then she said in a bitter voice,—

"You seemed very earnestly and pleasantly engaged with Vera Carstairs."

Clive flushed, not, as she fancied, from guilt but anger, and his voice was cold, even stern, as he replied,—

"Surely, Adèle, you are not going to be jealous of my little friend, Vera? Why she seems more like a sister to me, more so than my own. I do not approve of jealousy, Adèle; it shows want of faith."

"Jealous! and of Vera Carstairs!" cried Adèle Bertram, scornfully. "Clive, one would imagine there was cause for you to even think of such a thing! A little country rustic!"

Clive could not resist a smile as he looked over at Vera, who was seated at the piano. Rustic! She looked anything but that. And the idea of stately Adèle Bertram being jealous had a spice of amusement in it for him. Ah! Clive, a jealous sweetheart may amuse you, but what of the wife! Can peace and happiness reign where faith is absent!

"Adèle, come out on to the verandah, and do not make yourself so silly. Vera belongs to as good a family as the Nortons; and as to being rustic, in my opinion she shows to great advantage beside those Cross girls, who have seen two seasons in London," remarked Clive, putting out his hand and opening the French window; and Adèle followed, her bosom one tumult of jealous rage.

Adèle Bertram was one of those women who think that it is a lover's duty to ignore all other women: never to smile upon any woman save themselves; never to show any interest in another woman, be she friend, mother, or sister. She would have been jealous of a man had he shown any great preference for one above the rest of his acquaintance; therefore her feelings on finding him so much attached to a girl-friend may be imagined, and then he had gone out riding on the very day of her arrival! She would ever forgive that—never!

"Have you anything particular to tell me?" she asked coldly, when they were alone.

"Adèle, are you going to show temper so soon before our marriage? What have I done that you should treat me so coldly," was his reproachful answer.

"I am not showing temper, Clive. I am hurt at the way in which you neglect me for Vera Carstairs," she said, this time in a low, gentle voice; and Clive drew her to him, inwardly chafing at her uncalled-for jealousy, yet pleased at the love she evinced for him.

"Vera would laugh if she knew the tumult of doubt she had raised in my queen's breast," he said, laughingly.

"You would never dare!"

Clive's face paled, for Adèle had flung herself out of his arms and stood before him, her dark eyes gleaming like fire, her face pale and working. Something was wrong with her to-night, he told himself, with a sinking pain at his heart. He loved this woman, loved her deeply; but the strange temper she had shown on more than one occasion had startled him, and now he turned towards the house, saying moodily,—

"We had better go in. I think Nell is going to play."

And they went in, Adèle with a greater pain at her heart than Clive, for she loved him dearly, and felt sorry for her outburst directly it was over; but her pride and silly jealousy held her back.

She made her way over to where Vera sat in a corner listening with rapt face and parted lips to Nell St. Croix's playing. It seemed to her that he was playing to her—first pleading softly, then passionately, then the notes gave out a joyous triumphant burst that paled her fair face.

Was it thus he loved her! Would his soul sing such a triumphant song as that when he knew she loved him.

"Oh, Nell, Nell!" cried her heart, "I love you—love you! Let our souls triumph together!"

He looked across the well-lighted room and saw the face of the woman he loved grow passion-pale at the sound of his music. He felt that she understood, and played on—brilliant, joyous snatches that thrilled all there, and Vera listened to their message with dark, misty, love-lit eyes and heaving breast.

He loved her! She knew it now. Oh, could such love as theirs end happily! Could such brightness last! Even as she asked herself the question she met Adèle Bertram's eyes, and their glance of scornful pity sent a quiver of pain through her. Adèle was sitting next her, and bending forward, she said behind her fan,—

"What a pity he is not happy in his marriage; but people say that she is given to drink."

Vera shrank back as though she had been struck. His marriage! Then, he had a wife already! Yet he had looked love into her eyes to-night, and a guilty joy for a moment dimmed all other feeling. He loved her, and from Adèle Bertram's words his wife was unworthy. Then the full horror of it all came upon her, and her thoughts seemed to render her an object of contempt. What if his wife were still more unworthy! Did it make her less his wife?

Oh, Heaven! why had he not told them that he was married! Why had he let her love him? And then she remembered how he had been almost rude to her at times—times, she now supposed, when he remembered his wife. Given to drink! Poor Nell!

"I did not know that Dr. St. Croix was a married man; but I suppose he does not care to mention the fact," she observed aloud, and quite calmly.

When a woman first learns the lesson of love she learns also to command herself, and Vera did not show any outward sign of the ruin her hopes had suffered. She felt instinctively that Adèle was no friend of hers, and called her self-command to her aid in consequence.

"No, and he would not thank me for speaking of it, I am sure, as he has not told you himself; but I felt that you ought to be warned in

time, ere it was too late," was the cold, condescending reply.

"I thank you," retorted Vera, haughtily, and rising from her seat. "Your interest in my welfare is overwhelming, Miss Bertram; but you seem to forget that I have a father who is quite capable of looking after my interest," and bowing coldly, Vera turned away, leaving Adèle chafing with anger at finding the "little rustic" so fully mistress of herself.

Clive offered to see Vera home, and, as their way lay in the same direction, Nell St. Croix accompanied them. It was a pleasant night, and the three chatted together as those who have been accustomed to mixing in the same circle of society can.

Nothing that interested one was unknown to the other, but both Clive and Nell wondered at the calm, cold gentleness of Vera's manner, and when Nell paused to say good night at the corner of the street where his house stood she lifted her eyes and gazed pityingly, yet reproachfully, into his.

Those great sad brown eyes of hers haunted him all through the long hours of that night. Why that look of pity? Why that reproachful gentleness?

## CHAPTER V.

### THE WEDDING.

So bright and fair a morning would surely fill the bride's heart with peaceful, happy thoughts, and yet Adèle did not look as though all was peace with her.

Clive was to make her his wife to-day; she would be his and he hers till death did them part. She was happy, and looked it; but ever and anon the memory of her jealousy of Vera would rise up and send a little cloud across her brow, and the old angry feeling would crimson her cheek.

But as she stood before the altar in her white satin and Brussels lace, with her train of bridesmaids behind her, and the white-haired clergyman speaking the solemn words of the marriage service before her, all other thoughts fled, save the one that she would be Clive's wife.

A lovely bride, indeed, and well calculated to call up that murmur of admiration as she issued from the church into the golden sunlight that lay upon her dark head, as though pleased to have found an object of such beauty.

The great organ pealed forth the grand "Wedding March," the notes swelling in great triumphant peals up to the roof, and dying far away out through the open windows, over the yellow cornfields, while the birds paused in their song to listen; and Adèle's heart swelled in glad joy, chiming in with the tones of the organ, as Clive stooped his head, and whispered,—

"My wife!"

Vera had excused herself from the wedding on account, she said, of a cold. The truth was that she dared not trust herself to meet Nell St. Croix yet, and when he had called at the Vicarage she pleaded a headache to her father, and remained in her own room. She knew that Nell St. Croix would be there, and though she had shown such self-command at the Towers when Adèle had probed her wound she dared not meet him again.

When Adèle received the note of excuse she smiled coldly, cruelly, to herself. She could use this note to her advantage—and she did. The grandeur of the wedding-breakfast, the speeches, &c., have nothing to do with our story, only that when Adèle shook hands with Dr. St. Croix at parting she dropped a note, crumpled and soiled, addressed to herself in Vera's handwriting. Mechanically he stooped and picked it up, and in so doing caught sight of his own name.

Perhaps it was not quite the correct thing to do, but a curiosity to know what Vera had to say about himself to Adèle Bertram overcame his scruples, and instead of restoring it to its owner he placed the crumpled paper in his own pocket.

He went away very soon after the bride's departure, went straight to his own home, his little study, and seating himself in his snug armchair, where the bright sunlight that had smiled upon

the handsome bride of Olive Norton flattered in and lay in patches on the rich red carpet, and lingered about his dark head as he bent it over the note which had been penned by the woman she loved.

It was in the postscript that Vera had spoken of him, and these were the words that seemed as if they were written in letters of fire, words that called up a look of bitter pain to his paling cheeks.

"What you said about Dr. St. Croix's wife shocked me greatly, and I condemn him for having lived so long in our village under false pretences. Perhaps his wife was not wholly to blame."

"She is to be my curse even after death!" she muttered, fiercely, and looking at him then one would no longer wonder at the proud determination of his glance.

He had learned it in a hard school—that of cruel shame and deceit. Yes, Neil St. Croix had his secret—who has not!—the secret of a sister's shame and treachery, from which death had delivered him a year before he had come to Marlbury; and now he had learned to love a pure and innocent girl, this sister, Ada St. Croix, was to be brought as a bar between himself and happiness.

How could he go to Vera Carstairs and tell her that tale of shame, where his own sister had forgotten her purity and gentle birth for the sake of a scoundrel who had left her to die in the gutter, and whom Nell had sheltered until the day of her death? He could not. He must wait for time to smooth away these things; and then he began to wonder why Adele should have taken the pains to tell Vera this falsehood, but as wondering left him where he began he gave it up, and rose, feeling weary for the first time, to prepare for going his rounds.

He understood now why Vera's brown eyes had sought his so reproachfully—why the clear, girlish voice had grown so low and sad that night—for he felt that Vera had learned to care for him at last. Ah! he told himself, truth will out, and she will yet be mine in spite of all obstacles.

A month went by and no change occurred in the little village. No change! Yes, one, Vera Carstairs, going her rounds, visiting her father's flock, was noticed to have grown paler, the clear, fresh voice to have lost its careless ring, and the brown eyes to have taken a sombre, yearning glance that pained the hearts of the rough, but honest people to see. No one spoke of this to her father, for he himself was ailing, and they would not trouble him by speaking of the sudden change in his daughter.

Neil St. Croix came often as before to the Vicarage, but there was a something in Vera's manner—a cold, icy barrier placed between herself and him which he could not break through. Her voice was cheerful and welcoming when he came. She entered into their conversations as usual, and even sang for them, but in everything there breathed the words, "We can never be more than mere friends," and he grew faint, sick with suspense and "love and longing."

Then came news that the Nortons were nearing home, and great preparations were commenced for the reception of the bride; and during the week preceding their arrival Neil had so much to do that not once had he found his way to the Vicarage; and Vera, struggling with her love and her duty, pined and drooped like a fading lily at his absence.

"Hark! Vera, there go the bells to welcome home Clive and his young bride. I wish I had felt strong enough to be at the Towers to welcome them."

The Rev. Mr. Carstairs sat in his study, not as usual, by the table, writing, but in his arm-chair, which, despite the mildness of the weather even for the time of year, was drawn up before a blazing fire.

Vera nestled at his feet, looking up yearningly into the dear face of her only parent, the face which seemed to have suddenly grown so old, so faded and worn. What was the meaning of this weakness in her cheery father? Poor Vera, you will have need of all your self-command soon!

"Papa, have you spoken to Dr. St. Croix about yourself?" asked Vera, taking no heed of his words about those at the Towers.

"Yes, dear, and he says I am all right," he responded, cheerily; and then they relapsed into silence, she sitting with her head resting on his knee, one hand clasped in his.

Outside, the sun—the mild, golden, September sun—danced merrily over the tall trees, where the leaves were already taking on their autumn garb, in the hope of seeing it shown up by warm sunlight, that bright rich scarlet and deep russet and gold that makes England's gardens so fair a sight in the early autumn.

And bright shafts of sunlight crept in softly at the open window of the Vicarage study and played quietly among the girl's gold-brown hair, and peeped in among the silvered locks of the old Vicar, while the sweet-toned bells pealed forth their welcome to the young couple in mad, lusty peals.

Vera's thoughts wandered away from the present to the past, and then on to a dreamland future. She did not notice the flight of time, nor that the bells were again silent, but sat on there, with her brown head upon her father's knee, her brown eyes gazing into the red heart of the fire. The fire burned down low and croaked with a dull thud, the sun's rays began to slant across the dark carpet, and still those two remained in the same attitude.

Suddenly Vera seemed to become aware of the intense quiet of the room, and she looked round with a shiver, but her father did not move, though she laid her hand upon his in rising.

Something in the awful hush of the room and the quiet of that white-haired figure startled the girl, and stooping over him she drew his head forward to the light.

Only one glance was needed to tell her that she was alone. Her father's spirit had gone out while those joy bells were ringing—they had rung his welcome to Heaven!

She did not cry out, the shock was too great; she only felt a cold, hard pain in her bosom, a wild chaos in her brain.

Footsteps sounded on the gravel path outside the study window, but she heeded them not, heeded not that the door was opened and someone entered.

"Great Heaven! Vera, what is this?"

At sound of Clive's voice she raised her head, and the sight of his horror-stricken, livid face did what the dead face had failed to do.

Burying her head on the welcome shoulder of her childhood and girlhood friend, Vera Carstairs burst into a flood of passionate tears, Clive stroking the shining hair, and murmuring soothing words as to a little child the while.

Naught save purity was in their thoughts and actions, but the jealous wife—who had followed to see if it were really anxiety about the old Vicar that had made Clive hurry off so soon after his arrival—who was now gazing in at them with that cold, cruel gleam in her eyes that had startled Vera, put a different construction upon this scene, and hurried away to plan her rival's ruin.

"He may not be dead. Let me go for Dr. St. Croix!" cried Clive, after a few moments, and not waiting for her reply he hastened away.

When the two—Dr. St. Croix and Clive Norton—came back, Vera sat in the same attitude in which Clive had left her; sat there as motionless and rigid as the dead Vicar; only on his face peace rested, hers was frozen in a look of horror. She did not seem to notice the young doctor, and when the necessary examination was completed she turned to Clive, saying, piteously,—

"Is he really dead, Mr. Norton?"

"Quite dead, Miss Carstairs. He had heart disease," responded Neil, gravely. "Tell me is there anything I can do?"

"Nothing now. I need no help save that of Anna," was the quiet, weary reply; and having given a few instructions to the charwoman who had entered the room, they took their leave, feeling that Vera was right. She was best alone in this the first hour of her sorrow.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A FOOLISH STEP.

MORE than a month had gone by since the death of the old Vicar. Clive often came to the Vicarage to chat and keep up the spirits of his friend Vera; and Nell, who had, or felt he had no excuse, kept away, his heart growing heavier each day as in his rounds he heard Vera's "shameless conduct" discussed, and had not the power to defend her.

Gradually her old friends dropped off, looking another way when she appeared in the village, or when she called, sending messages that they were "not at home," and Vera's heart grew sad and sick.

Her father's death had unnerved her, and now the strangely cold manner of those whom she had deemed friends rendered her weak and dispirited to a degree.

"I have only one friend, Clive Norton. He has proved true metal, the others are all false," she told herself, as she stood in the quaint old garden, which was sadly neglected of late.

Poor Vera! It was Clive's friendship that had lost her all the others; though had she known this, in the loyal purity of her heart she would never have treated him with coldness.

The new Vicar was expected soon, and Vera must leave the old home where she had danced as a merry child, where she had learned the pain and bliss of womanhood's love; leave the dear old home which seemed sacred, as being the home of her dear dead father, and seek forgetfulness in fresh scenes and pastures new.

At first she thought of going to her sister Agnes, but put this from her as unsuitable. She would go to her rich, fashionable aunt in London, and if she did not care for her to remain, she would go out into the busy world alone, and try in the race to forget the love that had only had its birth to be killed.

Even Dr. St. Croix, when she had met him in the village, was cold and strange in his manner. He would not intrude his love-tale upon her grief, and the self-restraint he laid upon himself gave his speech a coldness he was far from feeling.

As Vera stood in the porch one morning, where the brown, withered stems of the once lovely rose-vine trailed miserably down the trellis-work, Clive passed, and seeing her alight, black-robed figure, paused, calling out,—

"May I come in, Vera?"

"You are always welcome, Mr. Norton," was the gentle reply.

And Clive came up the pathway, and took her hand in his. On the evening when he found her stooping in dumb horror over her dead father, in the moment when, like a child, she laid her head upon his shoulder, came the knowledge that this pure girl was dearer to him than she should be.

He felt that his marriage with Adele Bertram was a mistake—Adele, who, by her wild jealousy, had driven thoughts to his brain that otherwise might have lain dormant. He felt a wild longing to take Vera to his heart, and pour out his tale of misery and love, but he dared not.

She looked so calm, so pure, as she stood before him in her sombre robes and with the pale quiet of sorrow upon her brow, that he could only gaze silently at her. But something in his handsome face startled her—a recklessness that was new to it—and involuntarily she put the question,—

"What is the matter—your wife?"

"Is quite well, thank you," he interrupted, with a bitter, reckless laugh. "She will drive me mad or into my grave. But do not fear for her. Only a few months married, and I would give ten years of my life to be free!"

"What are you saying, Clive Norton?" exclaimed Vera, in horrified accents.

She had thought Clive at least was happy.

"The truth," he returned, in a half-dogged tone, that told he was deeply hurt.

He did not say how he and Adele had that morning quarrelled bitterly about Vera, how the wife had hurled cruel falsehoods at the husband's head, and how he, the husband, had retorted by informing her that if he could he would be free



and marry Vera the next day, if she would have him. He only stood and stared moodily over the bare fields after that last reply.

Vera broke the silence by saying that she was going away from Marlbury. This seemed to rouse him, for he threw back his head, as if in defiance, and waited for her to finish.

"You see, the new Vicar will be here next week," she said, "and the people are all so strangely cold to me that I have no inducement to stay on at Marlbury. I go to-night. No one knows I am going, and no one will know where I go, not even yourself."

"Can I not do anything to make the journey less lonely? And oh! Vera, let me give you your old pet Brownie. No one else shall ride her. She will only eat her head off in the stable," said Clive, earnestly.

"What should I do with her? No, I cannot say yes. You have a wife to ride her," said Vera, gently.

"My wife shall never ride her. She has done all she could to render me wretched. She has driven—"

He paused. It would never do for him to speak to Vera of the scandal about himself and her. The feeling he entertained for her was so pure and true he could not let words that could do no good pass his lips.

His wife he had ceased to love. This girl he dared not love, and he put all disloyal thoughts from him with a firm hand.

"She is your wife," returned Vera, reprovingly, lifting her clear, sinless eyes to his.

"Which, to my sorrow, I know," was the moody response. "It is of no use your talking to me now, Vera. I may in the future learn to forgive her when my heart commences its fossilisation and all people are alike, but till then I shall remain abroad."

"Abroad! Are you leaving Marlbury, too, and when?" exclaimed Vera in astonishment.

"Yes, I am going away. I am not sure when. Perhaps soon—so night," was the short answer.

"Does your wife consent to this separation?" Clive laughed, and then catching the sad, hurt glances of Vera's eyes, said,—

"Consent? No. She does not know of my intentions. I merely told her that I might never come back."

They neither of them knew that the cold, dark, revengeful eyes of Adèle Norton were upon them. They knew it afterwards, when the whole village was talking of the barefacedness of the two to stand in the Vicarage gardens making their plans, while the poor young wife looked on. Ah! what would the old Vicar have thought of such conduct? And as they talked the good folks nodded their heads, and looked wisely sorrowful.

Neither of them guessed that they were being watched, and neither of them paid much heed to the expression of their faces. Both hearts were full of a great grief, and it showed all too plainly in their faces.

"And so, Vera, you will not take Brownie as a gift from an old friend? Well, then, I shall take her to London with me, and if you do not claim her within six months I shall have her sold," said Clive. "No, do not look at me. My wife shall not ride her."

Looking at his face, with that expression of set determination upon it, Vera felt that argument was worse than useless.

A silence fell upon them, and they stood for some time gazing over the cold, drear expanse of country.

Vera broke the silence.

"I cannot accept such a present. Do not be hurt at my refusal. I shall never forget you. I only wish to vanish from the lives of the people in dear old Marlbury. They will all soon forget me," she said.

Clive never forgot her. Years after he remembered how she looked as she stood in the dreary, deserted-looking garden on that most drear November day, with not a ray of sunlight to rest upon her—not a ray of sunlight in her life.

He guessed that she loved Neil St. Croix; he knew that the young doctor loved her, and in his own mind he wondered what it was that kept them apart; but he dared not speak, and

it filled him with a strange, painful pleasure to think she would remain single.

He knew that Vera could never love but once. The strong, deep love that her soul was capable of feeling had come; she had loved in vain, but she would never solace herself with another.

"I will not press you, Vera; your instincts are truer than mine," he murmured. "Good-bye, Vera, my little childhood friend!"

He stooped suddenly, and laid a quick but gentle kiss upon the white forehead.

"For old times," he whispered, and strode away, leaving the girl gazing sadly after him; and Neil St. Croix going through the church grounds as a short cut to the house of one of his patients, stopped short in horrified bewilderment. What did that caress mean?

The patient whom he went to see wondered what had come to her doctor that he was so silent and preoccupied. He had fancied Vera cared for him, and that the tale Adèle had told her of a dead wife—for it never occurred to him that she would say she yet lived—had caused an estrangement, and now he had seen her—his pure Vera—accept a kiss from Adèle's husband, calmly and willingly, as though it were no new thing.

Alas! how easily things go wrong!

Vera went away that night without bidding adieu to any one of those who had called themselves friends in her father's lifetime. Some suspicion of the scandal about came to her that very day, though she did not speak of it to Clive, and this had determined her in taking this step of disappearing from the Marlbury world.

Clive, too, went away that night, and the Marlbury world condemned Vera at once. Even the villagers who had "stuck up" for her, as they termed it, shook their heads when they heard that Clive Norton and Vera Carstairs had disappeared together on the same night.

"Oh, Heaven! and I have let myself love her so!" cried Neil St. Croix, writhing alone in his study with his love, unable even now to tear Vera's image from his heart as unworthy. She so pure, so innocent! There must be some mistake. Never would he believe her so fallen unless he heard it from her own lips. "I will seek her out, and force the truth from her," he told himself, and then, despite his assertion, he laid his dark head on the table, and hot, bitter tears fell from the keen eyes. What if he should find her unworthy?

Adèle Norton was taken ill with a violent attack of neuralgia, brought on by her own passion, and, of course, Neil was sent for.

"She has taken her revenge on me," said Adèle, as he entered the room, where she lay, pale and haggard, among a pile of rose-tinted pillows; "but," she added, fiercely, eyeing him with cold, cruel eyes as she spoke, "she has disgraced herself. Ha! ha! she will suffer by-and-by!"

"To whom do you refer?" asked Neil, coldly. "Pardon me, but I thought you sent for me on account of illness."

"And so I did. You know to whom I refer, Dr. St. Croix!" replied Adèle, "but you do not know that it was I who separated you. She thinks that you have a living wife. She loves you, but as she could not marry you she has taken her revenge on me."

"I must again ask you to pardon me, but I have no wish to discuss this matter. Why you told her that falsehood I cannot understand. Allow me," and, taking her hand, Neil counted her pulse in a professional manner.

When he took his leave he had made up his mind to go to London as soon as he could get someone to take charge of his patients; and during those weeks Adèle received a letter from her husband, saying that he was going abroad for an indefinite period, and had directed his bankers to forward her allowance to the Towers as usual. Brownie and Hunsar, his two pet horses, he had taken with him, the others were at her disposal.

"Brownie!" muttered Adèle, viciously; "yes, for her to ride!"

But she was wrong. Clive had given his Brownie into the charge of a friend, with in-

junctions if ever Vera came to claim her to let the mare go to her without question, as he had told Vera.

"How dare he write to me in this cock manner!" Adèle cried out, passionately, "me, his wife!"

"I think you are wronging Miss Carstairs and my son by your thoughts," said a quiet, well-bred voice beside her. "Why, because they both leave Marlbury on the same night, by the same train, should they be found guilty of the worst of crimes?"

"Why? Because Clive loved her before he ever came to Marlbury, because I have seen him caress her, while she stood with her head on his breast; ay, even after we were married!" was the fierce retort. "Was it not because of her that Clive and I quarrelled? Did she not sneak him away, on the day I arrived, to take her for a ride, the awful thing!"

"Adèle, you shock me by your un ladylike passion! So you quarrelled with Clive! Was not that sufficient to make him go away? Remember, a man does not like his wife to be jealous without cause—it tires him; and, in spite of what you say, I believe Vera is being misjudged. She has good blood in her veins, and blood will tell."

Vera Carstairs, you have an unexpected friend in the person of this proud, white-haired Lady Norton; and having come to the conclusion that Vera was innocent Lady Norton lost no time in writing to her son for an explanation.

The answer came after the lapse of two months, when the earth was white with an early fall of snow. Lady Norton's letter had gone to Paris, then followed on to Rome, by fits and starts, and at last reached him at Naples, and the answer was just what the mother had expected.

"You see, Adèle," said the proud old lady, showing her daughter-in-law the epistle, "how wrong you were? Read for yourself!"

"Dearest mother," so ran Clive's reply, "never has letter of yours astonished me as the one I received last night. Vera told me of her intended departure from Marlbury certainly; and we bade one another good-bye in the Rectory garden, but where she went, or where she now is, I cannot tell you, as she absolutely refused to let me know, saying that she wished to vanish from Marlbury utterly since they had behaved so coldly after her father's death. It is Adèle's fault that she left. Adèle set about a scandalous report about Vera and myself because she was jealous, and I know now that it had come to Vera's ears. I will do all in my power to shield our proud old name from contumely; but, mother, I cannot go back to my wife—not yet, at any rate. I loved her, but she has killed it by her dangerous jealousy, and—but, there, that is best left unsaid. Only believe, mother, that I know nothing of Vera Carstairs' whereabouts. With fond love, believe me, dear mother, your broken-hearted son, CLIVE NORTON."

Adèle gave back the letter without a word. Clive had left her for ever! She knew in her heart that he spoke truth, but with the cruelty natural to her she swore that Vera should be kept from her happiness—the happiness which she had missed by her own passion of jealousy.

How futile are such oaths sworn by such creatures the future will show.

## CHAPTER VII.

Poor, dirty, smoky, tolling, much-abused London was looking its dirtiest and smokiest one afternoon in the beginning of December. A grey mist, which did duty as light, hung over the city, and the dull yellow glare of gas-jets in the shops only served to add to the dreariness outside.

Dirty, greasy slush clung to the boots of pedestrians, and worked its way up the ragged, dragging skirts of the workmen's wives as they totted along the cold streets. This slush had been white, pure, glistening snow but an hour

before; but the heavy, plodding feet of the passengers had soon trodden the purity out of it. So runs the world.

And down one of the streets that slant towards the Thames Embankment a tall, erect figure, clad in black, came with steady, graceful step. The face was that of Vera Carstairs, but grown more womanly, with a calm, cold glance of the clear brown eyes that told its own tale of proud self-command, a close setting of the red, girlish mouth, a haughtier carriage of the brown head. Vera Carstairs grown more lovely, more womanly, but with yet enough of the old Vera about her to make the change more charming still.

There was no sign of poverty about her; the close fitting sealskin paleot, which just disclosed a flounce of rich black silk above the well-fitting boots, the soft crape bonnet and perfect gloves belonged to easy circumstances; and yet a stranger, looking at her as she walked along with that calm, cold face, would say that it was not the face of a happy woman. The unobservant might envy her her beauty and rich attire, but to the reader of human faces would come the thought—"Surely a broken heart beats beneath those soft furs!"

Straight on, without looking to the right or left, went Vera Carstairs towards the Temple Station, down the many stairs to the platform, where the train waited puffing and panting, like all else in London, in a hurry to commence its journey. It moved off as Vera walked slowly along, and as she passed one of the first-class compartments a man's face drew her attention and held her gaze till the train had flashed out of the station.

Neil St. Croix! In London! What was he doing there? were the questions that flashed through her brain in a moment of time. He had recognised her—she knew that by the look of startled wonder in his eyes.

Her face had grown paler than before when she took her seat in the next train, and as she sank wearily back one of the passengers bent forward, asking if she were faint. She replied in the negative, and then fell into a reverie, nearly letting the train carry her on to its journey's end in her preoccupation. She got out at Charing-Cross, where she found an old lady, with a kindly face peeping out from a mass of furs, awaiting her.

"Well, Vera," she said, in a gentle voice, that accorded with her expression. "I went to Mr. Clynton's, and found that Mr. Norton himself had given instructions for Brownie to be sold, and so I bought her, and have had her sent to Kensington. She seems a nice gentle creature, not at all likely to shy or get restive," she went on, her idea of a good horse being one that would jog on in an ambling sort of way, but never be guilty of a canter.

"Brownie can shy and grow restive too," replied Vera, with a half smile. "It was not her gentleness that induced me to buy her, auntie. It was that I had my first ride on Brownie, when dear papa was with me. Brownie is connected with so many things that occurred in that dear past."

This was said in a sadder, graver tone, for she was thinking of that ride to Dr. St. Croix's house on Brownie. Ah! dear old Brownie, she would recall many a sad hour as well as pleasant ones.

She smiled again sadly to herself as she remembered Neil telling her that she was a study in brown; and again, that Brownie's mistress, as he laughingly styled her, ought to have been named Brownie also.

Foolish nonsense, perhaps; but such nonsense, when it recalls a happy past, is often held more dear than a whole host of sensible remarks.

She had felt a thrill of foolish happiness when he spoke of the two Brownies, looking at her so gently with those keen, searching eyes of his.

"Well, my dear!" remarked the Hon. Mrs. Rosalyn, who had taken Vera up on account of her unaffected manner and rare beauty directly the girl appeared before her eyes. "It would be just as well if we return home; the carriage is waiting."

"You are not curious to know what I have been doing?" asked Vera, as they passed slowly

up the stairs, and so came out into the little narrow street, where stood a neat little brougham, on the box of which sat a sulky coachman—sulky at having his horses kept waiting in the cold.

"Not if you would wish to keep it secret," was the pleasant and sincerely-spoken reply.

"I do not, auntie. I wished to visit old Anna White. She lives in Catherine-street, and I walked with her as far as the Temple Gardens—her park, as she terms it," said Vera, smiling.

"Ah! and now, Vera, who else did you see? There is a look on your face that tells me you have seen or heard something. Your eyes are misty with some thought of the past."

The old lady spoke so gently, so gravely, that Vera bent forward in the carriage, half whispering—

"I have seen him, auntie."

To the old lady's questions of "where," Vera replied by telling all she had to tell.

It was not much, but Mrs. Rosalyn told herself that if she were a man who loved, as he could not help loving, Vera, she would have followed her even if there were a —. But the Hon. Mrs. Rosalyn had her doubts as to this wife, and at once set herself to find out.

Neil St. Croix, sitting in his surgery, just finishing up business preparatory to leaving Marlbury for London, was startled by the unmistakable rat-tat of a telegraph boy at his front door; and a few minutes later his boy handed him an orange-coloured envelope.

"Your mother dangerously ill. Come at once," were the words that met his gaze; and in the horror of the first moment he forgot that he must give up his search for Vera, as his mother was staying at a little country seaside town.

It was on his way thence that Vera had flashed past him, calling up all the joy and pain of her love to mingle with the pain and suspense on his mother's account.

He had seen her—his love, his Vera, whom he had vainly tried to find during all these weary months—and he could not speak with her; could only sink back with a half groan at what seemed to him just then a cruel fate that brought the cup of happiness so often to his lips only to snatch it away.

The quick look of passionate, startled joy on Vera's face sent the blood leaping madly through his veins, and he almost forgot the sad cause of his journey—the fact that he was as far from knowing Vera's whereabouts as ever, in the exultation of remembering that involuntary confession of her love.

The country through which he travelled was all wrapped in a cloak of pure white, and the tall trees stretched their snow-clad, lank arms over ice-bound streams.

Calm and quietly beautiful looked the world to him, as he gazed out at the white panorama passing before his eyes!

At length, after hours of travelling, Neil found himself at his destination. To march off without looking to see if a carriage were waiting him was, of course, the most natural thing for him to do under the circumstances; and accordingly away he went up the High-street, then through a small byway, and finally into a small square of prettily-built bay-windowed villas, with stained-glass doors, which stood invitingly open in summer, as if such people as thieves were unknown.

But these doors were all religiously closed now, and Neil had to knock and ring to gain ingress.

The boy who answered his summons stared in surprise, but, of course, made no remark until Neil put the question,—

"How is my mother! Which room is she in?"

"Madame St. Croix is well, I think, sir," was the astonishing reply. "She is in the drawing-room, Mr. Neil."

Neil gazed at the boy as if he had lost his senses; then, turning abruptly, made his way to the room indicated.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, on beholding that lady seated in her accustomed easy chair doing lace work, "what is the meaning of the tele-

gram which I received, saying that you were dangerously ill!"

His mother raised her eyes quietly, as became a woman of her distinction in society, showing neither joy nor surprise at his coming, and answered in a clear, pleasant voice,—

"You are the victim of a hoax, my son; I was never better. What a waste of time, and, I suppose, money! You should try and find out who sent it."

Neil turned away impatiently; his mother's coldness vexed him. What did it matter who sent it! He had lost sight of Vera again, and all for nothing.

"I suppose it is another of Adèle Bertram's tricks; because she has ruined her own life she would ruin ours," he told himself, and Neil had guessed the truth.

Adèle knew instinctively why he was going to London, and, risking all, telegraphed to a friend at Southdon to send for Neil, thinking that, at any rate, she would keep his happiness from him as long as possible.

She had traced Vera, and discovered that she and her aunt were going to Leedon, a little old-fashioned village on the Essex coast, to spend Christmas with the Hon. Mrs. Rosalyn's mother-in-law, and she hoped to utterly separate them. But—

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men  
Gang aft agley."

Neil did not, as Adèle had planned, start immediately for London or Marlbury; he chose, instead, to stay a short time, and think out the strange animosity that Adèle bore him. He could not tell that she hated him because he saw beauty of character and loveliness of form in the girl who was her rival—of her own making, truly, but there was a cruel sting in that thought—she herself had driven her husband to love Vera Carstairs. She would like to kill her!

"Mother," he said one morning, as he rose from the breakfast-table, "I am going to take a ride into Leedon, and shall call upon old Mrs. Rosalyn. Any message?"

"No," she replied, quietly. "Mind you are back to dinner; I never wait, you know that," and then she settled her skirts and swept out of the breakfast room with a soft rustle of crisp cambric and a flutter of lace.

"There is no fear of my being detained there," he muttered, as he sauntered out of the house to the stables. "I feel half-inclined not to call; proxy old thing, the dowager."

And so, only being half-inclined when he started, by the time he had reached the pretty village he was quite determined not to call. Leedon was always pretty; in the summer-time great oaks and chestnuts spread their thick-leaved arms over the gabled roof-tops of the large rambling buildings occupied by the "gentry," and completely hid the smaller dwellings; sweet odours from hidden blossoms made to breathe an exquisite joy. In the winter the old grey, moss-grown houses stood up amongst the tall, brown trunks of the trees like grim idols watching over the small, white cottages; and the white snow made a fair, soft carpet for the red-breasted things that hopped so saucily about.

Neil concluded his business, then went to the livery stables to put up his horse while he sauntered off for a stroll. He did not pay much heed to what was going on around him, merely giving directions and then turning away; but to his surprise he felt a cold, soft nose laid against his hand, and then a low whinny of pleasure sounded in his ears.

Wheeling round quickly Neil saw what appeared to be "Brownie" standing beside him, with a look of recognition in its large, intelligent eyes.

"Brownie," he said, a trifle huskily, laying his hand on the pretty creature's neck, and the mare threw back its ears and again whinnied, showing him plainly that it was no mistake. Brownie stood before him!

"Could you tell me who rides this mare?" he asked, turning to one of the men.

"Oh! that belongs to the Rosalyns. Their stables is not big enough to hold all their cases, sir, so we get them sent down here," the man



explained; for which piece of information the young doctor bestowed upon him half-a-crown, much to his astonishment.

His determination not to call at Hill Lodge vanished in a moment, for the stableman had scarcely pocketed his ducous ere Neil was striding away up a hill where his beacon light lured him on—a very substantial light—being formed in the shape of a long, red-brick house.

"Yes, Mrs. Rosalyn was at home," he was informed, and was duly ushered into the presence of the "prosy old dowager."

After making the ordinary inquiries about her health, &c., Neil plunged into his real motive for visiting her.

"Oh, Brownie! Why she is Vera's. My daughter-in-law and her niece, Vera Carstairs, are staying with me," was the unexpected reply.

"Is Miss Carstairs at home? I know her well. Can I—"

"She is out on the lake; you can go and find her if you like," said Mrs. Rosalyn. "She is a dear, sweet girl, and I have grown quite fond of her, though she has only been here a week. A sad thing, her father's sudden death, and very wise of her to go at once to her aunt. Not many girls would have had the sense."

Here the old dowager paused for breath, and poor Neil, fearing another rhodomontade, hastened to thank her for her kind permission, and made his exit.

With a beating heart he went down the wide but short avenue of bare chestnuts, that stood like gaunt, dark spectres in the crisp air. On either side stretched a broad sheet of white, and further on was the lake, frozen over.

At first he thought that Vera was not there, for only the clear white lake and sloping banks met his view; but presently, as he drew nearer, he saw a tall, slight figure emerge from behind a clump of evergreens and advance slowly towards him.

It was Vera—Vera, with that new womanliness upon her that struck him as an added charm. He had ample time to scrutinise her, for she was evidently thinking deeply; but as they came close something told the girl that she was no longer alone, and looking up quickly she saw him.

For a moment she looked as if about to faint, but she quickly recovered herself, and put out her little hand, saying softly, joyously (she could not command her voice),—

"Dr. St. Croix!"

"Vera!"

He took the hand she gave him, and held it while, hurriedly, passionately, but clearly, he told her all he guessed of Adèle's plot, and what she had herself told him in her mad anger against Clive! and Vera stood there, white as the world around her, wondering how a woman could have conceived such a plot merely from unfounded jealousy.

"What have you to answer, Vera? Oh, my darling, I have suffered so!" cried Neil at last.

"And I, Neil, for I love you!"

The words were simply spoken, in a low, quick-breathed tone; and the sweet face grew passion-pale as she laid her brown head on his breast, lifting her brown eyes, so dark and limpid with love, to his.

"Never to part," he whispered; then in a more ordinary tone, "I had a letter from Clive the other day. He has made up his mind never to come back to England. Poor fellow, what a ruined life!"

"But how came you to be here?" asked Vera; and Neil had to go over the story of his meeting with Brownie, and her friendly recognition.

Vera smiled softly as he told her. Dear old Brownie! She would love her more than ever now, for it had given her back her lover.

Two months later, when the earth was smiling at the promise of spring, Neil St. Croix returned to Marlbury—not alone, but with his bride, Vera.

Their home-coming was unannounced. No one knew when to expect them, so when Adèle's Norton rode by their brougham and caught sight of the occupants, it is no wonder she lost her presence of mind, and whipped up her horse so fiercely.

Vera saw her, and read the tale of her suffering in the haggard eyes and careworn expression on her strange, beautiful face.

"I pity her," she said, turning to her husband. "I wish Clive would forgive her."

That evening she came into the surgery, where Neil was looking over his books, and holding out a letter asked him if she might send it.

It was to Clive Norton. A gentle, womanly letter, asking him, as an old friend, what he intended doing with his life; if he could not try, by a little forbearance, to cure the irrational temper of the woman who bore his name, and who loved him with the whole of her passionate heart.

And the reply came in the shape of Clive himself. He had nipped his passion for Vera Carstairs in the bud, and could look Vera St. Croix honestly in the face when they met at the Towers two days after his return.

The great and overwhelming love had deepened into a pure, deep reverence, that put the possibility of his again loving his wife for ever out of the question.

He might grow to regard her with a calm, quiet affection; but the first love had died. Adèle knew this, knew that she could never hope to hold the same place in her husband's heart, and in her manner there was a submissive sadness which gave to her the charm which had before been wanting.

The villagers of Marlbury, in their honest repentance at the injustice done to their old Vicar's daughter, clubbed together to buy a testimonial for the doctor and his wife, which they carried to the house in triumph, and presented with many protestations of good will; and Vera taking the gift—a pretty silver biscuit basket—told them it was worth the pain to afterwards be so assured of the love they had felt for her and her father—a speech which sent them away happy.

Adèle had confessed all to Vera—how she had added those lines to her note, and sent that telegram to Neil; and in giving and asking pardon the two women became friends, greatly to the delight of Lady Norton.

"How is Brownie!" asked Clive, one evening, as he stood by the young doctor and his wife after dinner—they were dining at the Towers. "I heard that you bought her. Poor old Brownie! she caused you no end of trouble."

"And," said Vera, softly, shyly, "if it had not been for her I should now be away in Switzerland with my aunt, and Neil searching for me in London. Ah, I love Brownie! I owe all my happiness, my husband, to Brownie."

[THE END.]

## THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

—10:—

### CHAPTER VIII.

"MOTHER, did you ever know a man—a gentleman called 'Humpty?'" inquired Mary, as she seated herself at the table.

"Sakes alive! I should think so; old Mr. Darvall's secretary, and very clever, and up to all kind of things with chemistry. He was years in the family, a distant poor relation, and he died not long after the old man."

"No, he did not die, mother; he is alive, and I was talking to him to-day!"

Mrs. Meadows dropped her tea-cup with a crash as she screamed,—

"Talking to him! talking to the dead! Then, my poor child, your days are numbered!"

"But he is as much alive as I am, mother. I assure you he is."

"Alive! he has haunted the place for years!"

"Yes, but haunted it in the flesh. He lives beyond Caversham; he has a good income of his own, and keeps two servants. He told me so, and he often comes over to 'The Place,' and looks about for old times' sake."

"Oh, that he does! and many's the poor creature he has frightened into fits—just fits!" she added, emphatically.

"I don't know why—he did not frighten me!"

"What else was he telling you?"

"He told me that he was very learned, that he had nothing to do, and if I liked he'd give me lessons twice a week—Tuesdays and Thursdays—at two o'clock."

"Great patience! And where, in the name of goodness! Here?"

"In the shell-house, if you have no objection."

Mrs. Meadows pondered. Here was an easy way of perfecting her daughter's education, and a good teacher, for Humpty was wonderfully clever. This was a grand chance for Mary, providing Humpty was solid flesh and blood, and no ghost.

Mary was very confident on the latter point, and after a consultation with John, Mrs. Meadows agreed, and she and her husband chuckled to one another, and said,—

"We knew she would come round, she is coming to it at last. The only pity is she can't learn dancing and music."

During the next three months Mary Meadows attended in the shell-house—not once, but four times a week—and made rapid progress, being just as eager to learn as her master was to teach her.

They read the British poets—Milton, Dryden, and Pope; plays of Shakespeare, essays and histories, so that Mary gleaned some notion of the outlines of English literature. And, moreover, she had a French lesson every day.

Her mother was charmed with her progress, and said over and over again,—

"Well, certainly, Mary, to hear you talk now, and the grand genteel words you use, is quite beautiful."

Mary had also learned to like her teacher, despite his bushy eyebrows, and his piercing, fierce little eyes. They were excellent friends, and he taught her other things besides literature and French—many a sage counsel, many a bit of worldly wisdom did he drop into her ear, as they sat with one book between them.

Mary worked him a cap, slippers, muffs, &c.; lectured him for his moroseness, for his freedom of speech, for the length of his beard, for his shyness of publicity, in making their school-room of the old shell-house instead of her mother's best parlour, which was entirely at their service.

"All my life long I have skulked in byways and crept into dark corners because of this back of mine, till it has become a habit; and I could no more go to and fro like other people than a bat could soar to the sun. It's my nature, Mary; and though I live in the shade I have some alleviations of my unhappy condition. I have seen and learnt more than two ordinary people who go about the world with fine, upright figures. My life, after all, has not been as miserable as it might."

"Still, I pity you very much, Horace!"—she called him Horace, not Humpty, much less Mr. Montagu. You have few friends, you say, and they are dead. You have never enjoyed life when you were young—riding, dancing, swimming, running, are all unknown to you. You have never seen the great world save through other people's eyes, and you have never had a sweetheart."

"And you think that a loss! You and your sweetheart were certainly people to envy," said the old man, sarcastically.

"All men are not like him. You would not have befooled a poor girl—of that I am perfectly certain."

"No! more likely she would befooled me. Now, Mary, this is idling; begin your French verbs. No more talk."

These little discussions frequently cropped up among the lessons, and the lessons lasted without interruption till early in the autumn, and then two things happened.

Firstly, the Australian Darvalls, having made good their claims, came down and took possession of the house, and the shell-lined school-room had to be abandoned.

One morning an open carriage and postern stopped at the West Lodge. It contained two gentlemen from London, and an attorney; they had come to take over the place.

"This is Mr. Frederick Darvall," said the attorney, introducing Mrs. Meadows to her future mother.

Mr. Darvall knitted his brows, and Mrs. Meadows dropped a curtsy.

Mr. Darvall was a dark, forbidding-looking man, with a dreadful turn in one of his eyes, and the smoke in a harsh voice.

When Mr. Meadows said,—

"I am proud to see you, sir; and it's many and many a year we have been waiting and looking for an heir to 'The Place.'"

Mr. Darvall frowned heavily, and said,—

"Stow all that—send up someone with the keys."

"Here, Mary, will you take them?" said her mother, hurrying in and snatching down the bunch.

As she did so she whispered,—

"I don't like the looks of him at all. No, and I would not wonder if he was an impostor! Fancy a Darvall with a cock-eye!"

Mary had no time to discuss the matter at present, for the carriage was waiting, and the occupants were shouting. So she seized her sun-bonnet, and ran out in haste.

"Hello! this is more like it!" cried Mr. Darvall's companion; a broad-shouldered man with a red face and very blue eyes. "I see they grow pretty girls in these parts. Take a seat, miss," opening the door.

Mary was all for excusing herself, and walking, but Mr. Darvall broke out, fiercely,—

"Here, get in, young woman, and don't keep your betters waiting. Get in, and look sharp!"

So, with a rather heightened colour, the "young woman" complied, and took her seat at once with her back to the horses.

As they drove up the long moss-grown avenue Mr. Darvall's friend put several questions to Mary.

"Been long at lodge, my dear?"

"Was born there."

"Never seen any of the old family—old Mr. Darvall, or his son?"

"Never!"

"Place shut up all these years?"

"About eighteen years."

"Any friends of family now living in country?"

"No—I think not."

"We shall be wanting some pretty housemaids. My dear, would you like a situation?"

"No, sir, thank you," rather stiffly.

"Oh—I see. You have a sweetheart, and another situation in view. Is that about it?"

To this Mary vouchsafed no answer, and they had arrived at the hall door, and she got out and fulfilled her duty, being the first person to throw open the mansion to its rightful owner after an interregnum of many years!

The place was big, and Mr. Darvall and his friends walked through room after room, admiring their vastness and deserted grandeur.

They went through saloons and drawing-rooms, the oak-room, library, and grand dining-room; they ascended to the state apartments and chief bedrooms.

Up and down the house they wandered, the new owner being very silent and self-contained; if he felt any joy in coming into such a mansion he dissembled it well.

His friends examined every nook and cranny with much eagerness and curiosity. They inspected the stables and yard, and passed over the garden and then came away; and that evening the neighbourhood learnt that Mr. Darvall, the heir to "The Place," had come from Australia to inhabit the home of his ancestors.

Painters and upholsterers came first and beautified the place; then detachments of servants arrived. The stables were filled; strange men worked in the gardens and yard, and two powdered footmen lounged in the hall.

At length the family arrived, consisting of Mr. Darvall as before—very tall, powerful, and dark, with a scowl, a squint, and a stoop; a short black beard and a closely-cropped black-bullet head; his favourite attitude was with his hands in his pockets, and you never could tell when he was looking at you, so uncertain was his eye.

There was his friend, Captain Burr—evidently

a sailor—with a round jovial red face, and there was his daughter and her companion, Mrs. Martin—this was all. But their retinue was immense, and the fame of Mr. Darvall's riches, and the fortune he had made in Australia, spread far and wide; some people estimated it at something very little short of a million of money.

## CHAPTER IX.

JOHN MEADOWS was kept on by the new proprietor, but his ideas were obsolete, and he had two gardeners put over him, his superiors. This, after a reign of twenty years, was highly displeasing to John, but something worse was in store for him—do misfortunes ever come alone! All his savings, his life's earnings, were invested in a bank, a bank that broke, and he was ruined, penniless, save for his salary of eighteen shillings a week.

The blow broke his heart; he was fond of money, and heaping up pound to pound had been the greatest pleasure of his life.

Mary would never forget, as long as she lived, that scene. She came upon her mother with her apron over her head, a letter on the floor, and her father resting his head in his arms and sobbing like a child. It is a terrible thing to see a man cry.

Mary stood aghast, but she was not long left in ignorance of the family misfortune.

The family at the West Lodge were rather pinched that winter; eighteen shillings a week, when coal is dear and meat a shilling a pound, and there are three mouths to feed, is not a very large sum.

Mary worked hard at the needle and made sufficient to clothe her mother and herself, but in every way times were bad.

In the bleak days of January John Meadows, who had long been failing, was obliged to give up work, and then nothing but starvation or charity stared them in the face.

Humpy proved to be a generous benefactor. He came over by night by stealth, and brought jellies, tinned soup, wine, and meat, and blankets for the sick man, and he pressed a ten-pound note into Mary's hand, as a loan—yes, only a loan—he assured her eagerly.

"It is a gift, it is charity," she cried, tears streaming down her face. "How can I ever repay you? I'll try, if I work my fingers to the bone; but if I can't I do not feel it hard to accept of charity from you," and she bent down and kissed his hand.

John Meadows did not linger long. A few nights before his death he called his wife to his bedside, and said,—

"Jessie, are you there? There's one thing lying on my mind that I never expected. It seems to be borne in on me now that we ought to tell her."

"Aye, John. It shall be as you like."

"It won't make no difference to you. She will still be your daughter, Jess, but she should know that she is no kin to us—no more than a stranger passing the gate."

"Shall I tell her, John, or will you?"

"I will, now; the sooner the better, for my voice is falling me. Call her up, if she is below."

"Mary," he said, as she entered with noiseless step, "I won't be here long. I'm going fast."

"Don't. Don't say that, father," she entreated, throwing herself on her knees.

"You have been a good daughter to me, and I maybe might have been better to you. When one is lying here like me, there's lots of time for thinking. Maybe I was harsh and headstrong about that match of yours, but I thought I was doing all for the best. I acted as if you were my own. You, Mary, have been the apple of my eye; but, Mary, I'm going to tell you what comes hard to me to say. You are no child of ours!"

Mary, who had been kneeling beside the bed with his hand in hers, gasped, and looked at him with a pallid face.

"No; though you're as dear to us, every bit, as if you were our own. I never thought to tell you, but I feel that I ought to."

"Who am I? Who do I belong to, then?" she faltered.

"No one knows! no one knows—you're a foundling—but our two selves. I saw a white bundle in the orchid house one evening, laid near the stove, and when I took it up it cried, and was a live baby. I brought it home, and we reared it up instead of a little Mary we had lost, and we have had no reason to repent it."

"And I am that nameless child?"

"Yes, my dear, but you are our child—you won't forget that."

"Never, father!"

"There was no one asking or looking for you since; no mark or clue—nothing but a plain set of baby clothes, and a queer old ring round your neck—a ring just tied there as if it was for you to suck and play with—no more."

"I have the things, Mary," broke in Mrs. Meadows, "and you shall keep them yourself! now, as you have the best call to them. See here!" rising and unlocking a red leather work-box that stood on the chest of drawers, "here it is!"

It was a thick gold ring, chased in an old style, but not specially remarkable or valuable. No coat-of-arms, stone, or even motto was visible.

Mary held out her hand for it in silence. She took it, turned it over, looked inside it, and finally put it on her finger in place of another ring she had once scornfully thrown away.

"Father and mother," she said, still looking at the ring on her hand, "I can scarcely believe this! I can't feel that I belong, even in name, to any but you; and what you have told me will make no difference. We will keep together as long as we live! I will be to you as your own child."

"Yes, you and your mother, Mary. You won't want me, my days are numbered," said the sick man, in a faint voice. "What's to become of you I don't know. Mary, you will have to strive to keep a house over your mother's head."

A few days later, and John's own head was laid low—was laid in Danford churchyard; and his widow and daughter, having given him decent burial, had to sit down and look their condition courageously in the face.

The pretty girl at the lodge had not been unnoticed, and more than one invitation had been sent to her to join the staff of domestics at "The Place." Necessity is a hard mistress; and, after a while, Mary was driven to take what went sorely against the grain—a post of under-housemaid in Mr. Darvall's family. She was to have the West Lodge for her mother, good wages, and permission to sleep at home every night. It was not a bad offer, and the work was lighter than stitching twelve or fourteen hours a day for workshops in Caversham, and wasting sight and time for very paltry pay.

That Mary Meadows was a good needlewoman was soon discovered, and after a time she was promoted to be sewing-maid to Miss Darvall—a post that suited her far better than the broom-and-duster business, as she sat all day sewing in the lady's dressing-room, secure from flirting, fast men, and sharp-tongued maids.

Miss Julia Darvall was tall and fair, hair a lovely golden (dyed) and most abundant; she had a figure thin to leanness; unusually large hands and feet; a wide mouth, brilliant teeth, good eyes (grey), and a beautiful skin. By nature she was a born flirt, and cared for little beyond dress, dancing, and admiration. Her companion, Mrs. Martin, was a gaunt-looking, grey-haired lady, who managed the housekeeping, and was only companion and chaperone in name. Strange to say, Julia seemed to prefer her sewing-maid as her confidante, and talked to Mary, after a time, as openly and unceremoniously as if she were her equal. She always preferred, if the truth were known, the company of those beneath herself, and her ignorance on some subjects struck her rather cultivated servant as something quite astonishing. Now and then she would drop an A, or speak ungrammatically. True, Mary had attributed those little slips to the fact that her mistress had been reared in the Colonies.

The Darvalls were a queer family. Mr. Dar-



vall was certainly not a fond parent. Between Miss Darvall and Captain Burne there was, if not open war, constant skirmishes, and a brisk interchange of nasty speeches. Mrs. Martin was neutral and mute.

Company poured into the place. Caversham rang with accounts of the dinners, and luncheons, and picnics and dances, that were given by Mr. Darvall, the millionaire. These entertainments were generally arranged by Captain Burne, who thoroughly understood the art of arranging everything in the very best style, and also of making his patron's money fly.

Mr. Darvall's horses, and equipages, and dinners were the theme of every tongue. It was whispered in lower tones that he gambled away fabulous sums; also that he drank. This was all the thanks he got for his princely hospitality and large subscriptions to all the local charities, not to speak of the foxhounds and harriers. He was a forbidding-looking man, who always seemed to be trying to be pleasant, and generally succeeded in being the very reverse.

People were afraid of him. His retainers slunk out of the way when they saw him coming, and he was known far and wide by the name of "Blue Beard."

Miss Julia had certainly a liberal allowance. Her gowns were all new, and all magnificent. Her diamonds rivalled the best in the county. Her father was liberal because he wished her to make a good match. So she confided to Mary, one afternoon, as she lay upon the sofa, and watched her maid's nimble fingers trimming a tea-gown.

"And I fully intend to make a good match myself," she added, with business-like frankness. "The only question that bothers me is, who to have?"

"Yes, miss," murmured Mary, seeing she was expected to say something. "I daresay you'll find it hard to choose."

"There's Sir Malby Crawley, over at Gaterhead, but he is too old. There's Lord Markham, he is up to his neck in debt; I would suit him very well, but he would not suit me. There's Colonel Forde, of Brookland; he is very well, but his mother is a horrid interfering old cat. The best match in the whole county is not here, and it's too bad; however, I shall meet him in London"—stretching her arms and yawning.

Mary looked up. She did not like to ask, and she really was not very keenly interested in her mistress's matrimonial schemes.

"The man I mean, and the man that would suit me, is the owner of Carnegort Park—Captain Elliot," continued Julia.

Mary dropped her scissors with a clang, and was a good while searching for them on the floor. When she resumed her seat, Miss Julia continued,—

"Carnegort is a lovely place. Such pictures, and statues, and gardens! And I hear he is young and handsome. But I've quite made up my mind to be Mrs. Elliot"—and she laughed.

"Have you, miss?" said the real Mrs. Elliot, quite serenely.

"Yes. Did you ever see him, Mary?"

"Oh, yes, miss, I've seen him," she replied, stitching away with her eyes on her work.

"And is he young, and good-looking? Do tell me all about him!"

"He is young. As to his looks, they are a matter of taste."

"Are they to your taste?"

A pause—and then,—

"He is not ugly. But handsome is as handsome does."

"Oh! I know he has the name of being an awful flirt. Did you ever hear that, Mary?"

"Yes, miss."

"Why, Mary, you are getting quite red, I declare. I expect he has been making love to you. I would not wonder if he had kissed you!" and she clapped her hands at the idea.

"I beg you won't wonder such things about me, Miss Darvall!" said Mary, stiffly.

"Quite offended, I declare, you silly goose! Tell me, Mary, have you no admirers?"

"No, miss," biting off her thread, and not raising her eyes.

"I wonder at that! I can scarcely believe

you. Of course you know you are a remarkably pretty girl, and you have a hand and a foot like a Spanish Princess," she added enviously.

"I don't like men, miss; and it's not much matter whether I am ugly or not. What's beauty to a girl in my station?"

"Yes, but it does matter. A wise woman said to me not long ago that the two best court cards for a woman to hold in the game of life are youth and beauty. Now you have both, and you have never played them yet. Don't hoard them up till the hand is over."

"I don't play cards, miss," pretending to take it literally, "and, as far as I have gone yet, my beauty has done me no good—just the reverse."

"Well, I mean to make the most of mine! I've three court cards—youth, beauty, and wealth, and I've another trump, best of all. I can make any man I choose fall in love with me. Yes, marry! You will see if this is a vain boast. I attract often when I don't want to, but when I really want to make an impression I've never failed yet."

"And yet you are still single, miss," said Mary, thinking that this was a curious fact, considering the lady's fascinations, and her age—four-and-twenty.

"Yes; but until now we have been poor, you know, and I never had a rich lover. This fortune that papa has got changes everything. Out in Melbourne we were not well off, and I did not get half the education of girls at home. I'm having music lessons now, as you know, and I do dictation with Mrs. Martin."

"Is Melbourne a nice place?"

"No. I loathed it, though I was born there—a great, ugly, busy city; everyone pushing for themselves, and the weak going to the wall. Everyone that was not a knave was a fool."

"Well, I'd rather be the fool of the two," said Mary, gravely.

"Would you? Well, I'm not so sure of that. I was a terrible boor once, and have rued it ever since. Yes, my good Mary! You may well open your eyes wide, and stare at me; but I assure you that of all the dupes there ever were I was the greatest. Oh! I have a story—not that I'm going to tell it—and if it was written down it would fill a book. I've had a lesson," she added, with a heavy sigh.

"And many a one before," said Mary, dryly. "We don't go through the world without one sort of teaching."

"Have you had a lesson, Mary?" looking at her eagerly.

"I don't mind allowing that I have, miss!"

Miss Julia rose to her feet in order to look at her better, and then said,—

"Make haste, and tell me all about it, Mary."

"No, miss; that is my secret—that is my life!"

"Of course, there's a man in the case," sitting down again. "I wish you would tell me; I'm as close as wax"—(a nice expression; but Julia never stopped to pick her words in private.) "I'm sick of reading, and I want you to talk to me, and I'm sure this story of yours would be quite exciting."

"No! not exciting at all," returned Mary, holding out her work. "Where will you have the bows placed, miss? on the shoulder—one knot, like the fashion plate?"

"Yes; I leave it to you—you have capital taste, far better than Celists. After all, Mary, love and sentiment is rubbish. I've come to that conclusion at last," said Miss Julia, with curious irrelevance. "Social duties are one's main interest; ambition is more satisfying, and holds out more tempting prizes than love. The great thing now is to know as many people as possible, to go everywhere, to be seen everywhere, to have a name for something—say it's lace, diamonds, horses, or dinners. I've not been long in society, and yet I've learned that. Next month, when we go to London, I mean to carry all before me, and to take the great world literally by storm."

For three or four months Mary had not heard of much less seen, her friend and tutor. She had no means of writing to him, for she did not know his address.

She began to fear that he was dead, when, on

returning home one night, she found a letter awaiting her, addressed in his well-known writing. It said,—

"MY DEAR MARY,  
"Meet me in the shell-house to-morrow at four o'clock."  
H. M."

Four o'clock was the time the servants had their tea, and the hour suited Mary very well. She stole out rather timidly, and, skirting round all the shady walks, at last came running to the shell-house at the top of her speed and rather breathless.

"Mary, in a cap and apron!" was the salutation from Humpy, who was seated in his usual place.

"Yes; I'm Miss Darvall's sewing-maid now, and very glad to get such a good situation," she answered, calmly.

"Still, I don't like it. It's becoming enough in one way, Mary, but not in another. You know what I mean!" he added, significantly.

"No, I don't!" she retorted, angrily. "I consider that this cap and apron suits Mary Meadows very well. Leastways, the valet says so," she added, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye.

"Don't say leastways, and don't talk to valets about your looks. Really, Mary, after all my teaching, I'm astonished at you! Come, sit down."

"Oh! I can astonish you twice as much as that!" she said, sitting down beside him, leaning her elbows on the table, and looking into his face with a smile. "Now, guess where have you been the last three months! This is the end of April, and I have not seen you since poor father died."

"I've been up in the North, and I've been in London looking after money. It turns out that I am next-of-kin to a wealthy old coal man in Yorkshire. I mean a man who owned large shares in mines. His lawyers ferreted me out; they carried me here, they carried me there; registers were raked up, wills were read, codicils read. The end of it all was that I find I am the owner of nearly four thousand a-year!" nodding his head solemnly.

"You don't say so! I congratulate you with all my heart," she said, seizing his hand and shaking it up and down.

"What good is it all to me, Mary? My life is nearly spent—I'm nearly sixty-six. If it had come when I was younger I'd have ventured out into the world, and visited places I've pined to see. Maybe my money would have drawn away attention from my hump back," he concluded, with bitter cynicism.

"You think far too much of that," said Mary, soothingly. "You are not half thankful for what you also have, and that is—your brains. Providence made up to you there—you never think of that."

"Well—no; and I suppose I may reckon them as some compensation too. Do you know what I'm going to do with my money?"

"No!"

"I'm going to hunt up the real heirs to this place! I am going to leave no stone unturned to track Godfrey Darvall, and Darvall's wife and child—or maybe children."

"And turn out Mr. Darvall that's here now!"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"Because I've no near kin of my own. All my life, or most of it, has been bound up with the real Darvalls. We are distantly related, too; oh! a long way off. I've a love for the name that seems foolish; all my stunted affections I have invested in Dausford-place. And the Darvalls—their prosperity is mine, their misfortune is mine, too. I suppose you could not understand this, Mary! but a withered old bachelor like me may have his eccentricities, may he not? Many people think I'm crazy."

"Oh, of course, you may do as you please. But I'm greatly afraid you will only waste your money!"

"I'll tell you if I do; I won't grudge it. I tell you more, Mary—this present man is no Darvall, in my opinion. He has not a single



"I HAVE QUITE MADE UP MY MIND TO BE MRS. ELIOT!" SAID MISS JULIA, LAUGHING.

trait of the race. In figure, voice, gait, he resembles none of them. He has their vices, but that goes for nothing; they are common!"

"His claim has not a flaw," returned Mary. "There was not a doubt about it—all the papers were correct."

"Yes, those his agents stole out of the writing-room of course were correct. You and I saw that little robbery," snarled the old man.

"Yes, we saw people taking papers certainly, but they may have been sent by the lawyers; and, besides this, they brought home all Mr. Frederick's books and letters and belongings from Melbourne. There is a sword-stick of his over the smoking-room chimney, and lots of skins, photographs and things, that are recognised as having been his."

"Oh, yes. I know all that, and it will be a hard nut to crack, but I will crack it yet. How do you like your mistress—to change the subject?"

"I like her very well; she is good-tempered and kind, and never says a cross word to me."

"Still she is no lady, I should say."

"Maybe she is not. She has never been properly educated; she does not know even as much as I do—fancy that!"

"Well, you are not so very ignorant, after all."

"We are going to London in ten days for the season," said Mary. "I shall be glad to go, and see a bit of the world, even as it were out of the back door. I'm tired of Daneford!"

"Just like all your sex, you must have change, change, change!" said the old man, peevishly.

"Well, you can't accuse me of having had change, considering I've never been out of the place for twenty years."

"Not since you were born, in fact."

"I was not born here. I don't know where I was born."

"The girl is raving. You were born in the West Lodge, and your name is Mary; your father was John Meadows, and you are maid to

Miss Darvall. Can I help you to anything else?" he asked, ironically, "since your money is gone."

"Horace, I had something to tell you. Before John Meadows died he told me something. I'm not his child—I'm no one's. I'm a foundling," and she leant her chin on her hands, and looked at him hard.

"John was raving, poor soul. You need not mind him, Mary; it's often the way at the last."

"He was as sensible and as collected as you are! He told me that he found a little bundle in the stove one evening, and he picked it up, and it cried. I cried; I was taken home and adopted then and there, for they had just lost their own baby."

"And there was no name, no bit of paper, no nothing!"

Mary shook her head, and put her hand in her pocket.

"Then you were just some live child that one of the girls in the house wanted to get rid of, and fostered on honest John and his wife," said Humpty, with cruel frankness.

"I don't think so," retorted Mary, stoutly. "Mrs. Meadows is my mother as far as my heart can go. John was to me as my father, but I believe in my soul that my real father and mother were gentlefolk."

"Oh, of course," and he laughed with scorn.

"Laugh as you like, I've been mistaken for a lady. Look at me!" taking off her cap. "Look at my fine hair, look at my hands, look at my foot!" pushing it out from under the hem of her dress, "It's half the size of Miss Darvall's!"

"Well, I don't say that you may not have good blood in your veins on one side," said her companion, with grim significance that brought the angry blood racing to her face. "I always wondered where your air of breeding came from. I grant you that! That often puzzled me; I never could make it out."

"Do you think you could make this out—the only thing that was found on me?" she asked, suddenly putting her hand in her pocket. She

added, "I brought this on purpose to show you," producing the ring.

Humpty took it up, glanced at it, and his whole appearance underwent an extraordinary change; he trembled all over, like a man who had the palsy.

He closed his eyes, opened them again, then he leant his head on both his hands, and sat for fully five minutes without speaking.

"Well!" cried Mary at last, "what do you make of it?"

"If it's what I believe," he answered, in a low voice, without raising his head, "If it's what I hope, I will make your fortune, but you must hold your tongue, and have patience. You are Mary Meadows for many a day to come!"

"Won't you tell me something! Won't you give me even a clue!" she asked, feverishly, standing up and laying her hand on his shoulder.

"I cannot give you what I don't possess! I've only my thoughts, and they may come to nothing. Good-bye," hurriedly holding out his hand; "leave me, there's five o'clock; run, or you'll be missed!"

(To be continued.)

THE wheel and its various changes and improvements is one of the most interesting of the topics of the present day. Just now the possibilities of the chainless wheel are being discussed, and the question arises whether the wheel of the future will be a bevel gear or the chain with which we are so familiar. One of the objections to the chain is that it works loose and in so doing alters the pitch and causes an increased friction, thereby making the wheel run harder. It is claimed that the chainless machine will be entirely free from this objection. There is also an added advantage, especially for ladies' wheels, in that the sprocket wheel and chain were very likely to catch the dress, many serious accidents having occurred from this cause.





THE SILENCE WAS INTENSE—WHEN MADAME HÉLOISE PAUSED.

## ORDEAL BY FIRE.

—10—

## CHAPTER V.

WHEN Nan grew calmer, and was able to examine the contents of that wonderful packet more closely, her feeling was no longer of unalloyed satisfaction. Loving Idonie as she did (in spite of the long years of absence and of her sister's neglect), she read between the lines of her incoherent note, and felt that all was not well with young Lady Trefuils.

All Nan's interest concentrated on Idonie's letter, the other epistle was from a firm of army agents, who briefly informed her that they had been requested by one of their clients to forward her a draft for £20, and the enclosed saloon passage in the *Calliope*; they believed the vessel to be a first-rate one, and if they could be of any use to Miss Lindsay in the matter of outfit, or so on, they were her's to command.

Perfectly civil and business-like, but still not giving the least clue to the situation, and, indeed, Idonie's note hardly gave that.

"MY DEAR OLD NAN,—

"I am very miserable, and I long for the sight of an old home face. I want you to come out to me at once. I am sending money for your outfit and passage. Don't wait, Nan, send your pupils to the wind and come to me. A little holiday will be good for you; and if you don't like Denizil, or he doesn't take to you, you can come home again. Don't disappoint me, Nan, for I have set my heart upon your coming.

"Your loving Sister,

"IDONIE."

Then in a corner was scrawled, in a tiny postscript: "Do come. I want you badly."

There was no message from Sir Denizil, and Nan had once declared she would never live on his charity; but then the case was different now. For nearly four years she had earned her own

living unaided, and to go out to India for a few months would be more like paying her sister a visit than throwing herself on her brother-in-law's support; besides, Nan never dreamed but what Idonie had consulted her husband, or how could she have sent the money? In all Nan's experience she had never met a wife with such a lavish command of gold as to be able to spend nearly a hundred pounds without first asking her husband for it.

Helen Lester came in just then and heard the wonderful news (not Mrs. Andrews's visit, Nan kept that to herself). Nell read Lady Trefuils' letter, and felt the same vague uneasiness that had troubled Nan.

"She must be in trouble of some kind. Of course you will go to her."

"I should like to; but—"

"Go on," said Nell, "you know you can trust me, Nan. Are you afraid of your brother-in-law. Is that it?"

"Supposing he does not like me, or supposing they only expect me to stay three months, how am I to pay my way back. Going to Calcutta is like burning my boats behind me."

"Not quite, dear," said the journalist, gravely.

"If this letter had come three months ago, when you were at the Art Gallery, I should have hesitated before I advised you to go to Idonie; but now it seems to me you give up nothing in leaving England."

Nan winced, yet it was quite true.

"Don't look so wretched," pleaded her friend.

"It isn't like you to look at the dull side of things, let me put the bright one to you."

"It hasn't got a bright one."

"Oh yes, it has. Idonie wants you. She has given you a tangible proof of it. Well, Nan, if you only stay three months in Sir Denizil's house don't you see you will have gained a step. If you have to earn your own living again you can ignore the last four years, and say that you have been living with your sister, Lady Trefuils; middle-class people worship a title; and after

that you'd have no difficulty in becoming a companion or lady help."

"But the passage-money."

"Well, dear, your sister can't turn you out into the world unprovided for. If she does not keep you with her she must pay your passage home; besides Nan," and the journalist smiled, "you forget one contingency. You are only twenty-four. Why shouldn't you meet some one more to your taste than poor Mr. Tom, and become a matron?"

"I shall never marry."

"Why," demanded Nell, "don't look so cross. I am not going to plead Tom's cause. Tell me why you think you will never marry. Do you mean you have lost your heart to some impossible hero?"

"Oh, no. I don't think I have a heart at all. I have never felt the shadow of a preference for any man."

"Which only proves you will take the disease, that men call love, pretty badly when your time comes."

"It never will come."

"Nonsense! Well, Nan, it is settled that you sail in the *Calliope* on New Year's Day."

"I suppose so. Nell, don't think me ungrateful. When the letter first came I was delighted, but—"

"But you have had time to work yourself up into a state of fright since. Now, Nan, I must go out to-night; but I don't mean to leave you here alone. Just put on your best bib and tucker, and you shall go too."

"I don't feel like parties."

"It isn't a party; at least, there is no hostess whom you need talk to. I am going to the first reception of the new clairvoyant, medium, prophetess, or whatever you like to call her, Madame Héloïse. I have two tickets, and am to attend on behalf of the *Novelty Gazette*. If you don't go the second ticket will be wasted."

"I hate such entertainments, they are all rubbish."

"That's a point I won't discuss. Madame

Héloise hails from America, and was all the rage there. She can send people to sleep, read their thoughts, tell their past, and predict their future. I am told that instead of confining her experiments to her own assistants, she selects 'subjects' from the general audience. Anyway, I believe she will be a big success. She is living now in small rooms in Chelsea, but no end of people find their way to her abode. Her charge is five shillings for a short interview, or a guinea for a synopsis of your life.

"And to-night!"

"Oh, to-night is semi-private. I don't think any one pays for their tickets. It's chiefly a sort of gathering of press people; those likely to be able to say a good word for her, you know. If she 'takes' in London, I am to interview her for the *Novelty Gazette*."

"Have you seen her?"

"Not yet. Oh, she won't be anything to look at, that sort of person never is. I expect she'll be big and bony, with a dead white face, glittering black eyes, and blue-black hair, that's a fair description of the last medium I saw. She was always in *déshabille*. Her body and skirt had a general tendency to part company, and her nails were dirty; but she was a wonderful woman for all that."

Helen chattered on. Her one desire was to cheer up her friend and take Nan's thoughts from her own affairs. She almost thought she had succeeded, till, as they were leaving the flat, Nan said suddenly,—

"Do you think, Nell, your Madame Héloise would answer me a few questions?"

"As to how long you would stay in India. What kind of man your brother-in-law is, and so on. Well, Nan, I hardly know; mediums don't often go into details, but it could do no harm to try her."

"I have put five shillings in my pocket."

"Oh, you won't want money to-night. All her demonstrations are gratis."

The small hall engaged by the enterprising stranger was not far from Tottenham Court Road, in a very dingy street. Nell, who never went anywhere till the last moment, had run it so close on this occasion that the performance had begun, and some of the audience looked at the friends disapprovingly as they made their way to two front seats.

The main body of the hall had been darkened artificially, but there was a brilliant light on the stage, and on it were two people, the Madame and a tall, elderly man, whom it was rumoured was her husband. Madame Héloise did not in the least resemble Nell's fancy portrait. She was quite young and very beautiful, only her beauty had in it something saddening. She seemed a mere girl, but she was thin almost to emaciation, and her glorious dark eyes looked too large for her face. She was very pale, and her white muslin dress enhanced her lack of colour. For the rest her attire was tasteful and fashionable, her dark hair was arranged in the latest style, and her small hands glittered with rings. But there was something weird and unnatural about her, especially about her eyes, which seemed not to see the objects actually before her, but to be fixed on space.

Several experiments in thought-reading were the first items on the programme. These were all successful, and a feeling of good ground among the audience that Madame Héloise was at least clever and intelligent.

"I have seen people as good," said Nell, critically; "but she is certainly very clever. What is she going to do next?"

The gentleman beside Madame next appealed to the audience to come on to the platform and ask his wife any questions they pleased. All he requested was that if her answers proved correct they would acknowledge it.

Madame subsequently described accurately the contents of a lad's pocket; told a much-admired juvenile-looking lady that she possessed four grandchildren (a shot which struck home), and made other conjectures which were admitted to be true, then came a little lull; and, before Nell Lester knew what her friend was doing, Nan had mounted to the stage.

All eyes turned on her. She was pretty; she

was young; she was evidently agitated. The audience expected a more interesting revelation than had yet fallen to their lot.

"Madame," asked the girl, "can you tell us the future as well as guess our past?"

"Try her," said the medium's husband. He spoke English wonderfully for a foreigner. "It is of course more difficult, but my wife rarely fails."

If he had said "never," Nan would have put him down as a charlatan; the "rarely" induced her to believe in him.

The medium rose and advanced to Nan; she fixed her wonderful eyes on the girl for a minute and then she said, in a strange, dreamy voice,—

"You're a strange story. You leave England to escape a lover. You face dangers you know not of, instead of remaining here to be a rich man's wife."

The words were audible all over the hall. It needed only one glance at Nan's face to tell that they were true.

Monsieur Desloges (his name was on the programme) produced a large crystal globe, which he placed on a round table. He drew up a chair for his wife, and directed Nan to kneel on a stool at her feet, her face, hidden in Madame's lap, while the medium looked over her head into the crystal globe which she was already fingering dreamily.

Then, having, so to say, arranged the tableau, Desloges went to the piano and began a reverie so soft that it would not have drowned a voice however low. There was a breathless silence. The whole audience seemed to hang upon the medium's lips, and Nell Lester had a wild longing to rush upon the stage, and tear her friend away. She felt almost as though Madame Héloise were a witch, and in consulting her Nan had, in some way, associated herself with the powers of darkness.

And then the medium spoke.

"I see a tiny cell, but it is not a prison; it is furnished like a bedroom, it has a red velvet sofa, and there are pretty things about. I see fine clothes and jewels. You are there." And she laid one hand on Nan's bowed head. "You are there, alone."

"I hear sounds of tumult. The shrieks of women and children, the oaths of men who see death staring them in the face. I see the smoke—the thick, dark smoke, curling upwards. I smell fire. It is a burning ship, and you are on board."

The silence was intense when Madame paused. You might have heard a pin drop.

"The boats are there ready to be launched. It is the last chance. The Captain's voice rings out, 'Women and children first!' You stand there in the frightened crowd who know that only a place in the boats will save them from certain death."

She paused. Another silence, and then a voice from the rear of the hall asked,—

"And is the lady saved?"

"Ask me not!" replied the medium. "The picture has faded out. I can but tell you the scenes I see reflected in the globe, and this one has melted away."

Nan found her voice by an effort.

"Tell me something more. Shall I live to reach India? Shall I be happy there?"

This time Madame did not look at the globe, but answered as one repeating a lesson.

"You will reach India. You will stay there one week, and you will wish with all your heart that you had never come."

One or two others of the audience had risen and stood waiting their turns to accost the medium.

Monsieur Desloges waved his hand to Nan as though to intimate to her her audience was over; and faint, trembling with excitement, she returned to her place next to Nell.

Miss Lester was not often extravagant, but when she had half-led, half-supported her friend to the door, she rashly hailed a hansom, and told the man to drive to the flat.

"You'll faint in the street if you attempt to walk," she said, when Nan protested. "You look just like a ghost. Oh! Nan, I never, never will consult a medium."

Nan's teeth were chattering.

"After all," she began, when they were nearly home, "she did not tell me anything so very terrible."

"Don't talk till we are safe in the flat," commanded Miss Lester. "I feel as if I had a fit of the blues."

But when after a cosy little supper the two friends sat down by the fire to discuss Madame Héloise they found that her predictions were vague, and that the darkened hall, the intense hush, the theatrical manner of the medium and her husband, had contributed to their fears quite as much as her words.

After all she had only vaguely described a fire at sea, and declared that Nan was one of the passengers in the burning ship; but she had also made the astonishing statement that the girl would only stay a week in India, and would regret that she had ever gone there.

"I am superstitious," confessed Nell. "I don't think that after this I could go to India; but on the other hand what hundreds of voyages are made safely every year, and how very seldom one hears of a fire at sea."

"I shall risk it," said Nan, quietly; "but, Nell, we won't tempt fate again. It has made me thoroughly uncomfortable, and I know that every night till I arrive at Calcutta I shall expect to be woken by the news the ship is on fire."

"I shall have no peace till I hear you are safe at your sister's. The idea of your returning in a week is ridiculous. Nan, however objectionable Sir Denzil is, he must have some regard for public appearances, and to turn his wife's sister out of his house before she had been there a week would make him the talk of all his friends."

The next few days simply flew. Only those who have left England for a distant country, not knowing when—if ever—they may see their native land again, can understand the conflict of feeling which attacked poor Nan. In those days she seemed to love even the paving-stones of London, and though the great metropolis had been a hard stepmother to her, actually refusing her the right to earn her bread within its walls, she would rather have stayed there and been a shop-girl all her days than have started for the brilliant unknown land she vaguely knew as India.

"I dread it more every day," she told Miss Lester. "Suppose I don't like the place I am sent to! Suppose her husband treats me as a poor relation!"

"Fiddlesticks!" said Nell. "If you are going to worry like that you'll be worn to a thread proper before you even get to Calcutta. You have I don't's letter, and I am sure she says in that that she wants you. As for Sir Denzil, I dare say he'll be much nicer than you expect, and, at any rate, Nan, he's bound to be a gentleman, and no gentleman could be rude or unkind to a lady in his own house."

Nan tried to take comfort, but found it very difficult. By mutual (though unspoken) consent neither of the girls mentioned Madame Héloise, and the vision revealed by her crystal globe. Nell hoped Nan was forgetting that terrible evening, for after that night neither of them had spoken of it.

"Now," said Nell, briskly, when the last morning came, "remember, Nan, it is not too late to change your mind. Shall I telegraph to Mr. Tom that you have repented, and are ready to become his bride?"

Nan laughed, which was just what the journalist wanted.

"All the packing is done," Nell went on, cheerfully, "and my luggage has been sent to my new digs. When I start to go to the docks with you I shall have left the flat for good. The porter's daughter is going to tidy up ready for Mrs. Benham, who is to be here this afternoon. Isn't it strange, Nan. By to-morrow she will be settled here as though she had never been away, and all trace of you and me will have disappeared."

"We have been very happy here."

"Very. I shan't like my new digs half so well. Now, Nan, you are to write to me, and tell me just how things are. You can use



me as a safety valve, for I know how to hold my tongue."

"I know that you have been very, very good to me."

"Fiddlesticks! I shall miss you terribly. And, Nan, I've been thinking. If you are not happy with Lady Trefusis, and want to come home, but don't like to ask her for the passage-money, you might come over in charge of two or three children. People can't keep their little ones in India after six or seven, and it's quite customary to pay some one to bring them home if the parents can't come themselves."

Nan looked a little brighter at that.

"I'm afraid, Idonie, will think me very old and careworn."

"You look years younger than I do, and, besides, you're sure to pick up on the voyage. I predict that when Sir Denzil sees you he will ask if Idonie has not made a mistake, and you are her younger sister."

"I wish I wasn't going."

"So do I," confessed Nell, "but I don't think you and I are strong enough to work against Tom Andrews' spite, and Nan, dear, you've found it sorrowful work to belong to the great army of the unemployed. Do take my advice, look on this Indian trip as just a pleasant holiday, and if it does not last so long as I expect, remember it will still have tided you over a very difficult time."

"You'll come and see me off!"

"Of course I will. I mean to confide you to the care of the captain, or some motherly lady passenger. You are much too modest, Nan, you'd shrink into a corner and let people snub you. Now I shall inform the captain that you are going out on a visit to your sister, Lady Trefusis, and that she or Sir Denzil will meet you in Calcutta. I assure you the mention of the title will be most effectual."

But it happened that Miss Lester was able to go "one better" for her friend. The first people she saw on board the *Calliope* were a distinguished author and his wife. The distinguished author had known Miss Lester from a child, he and Mrs. Allardice honoured her brave uphill fight, and had shown her many a kindness. When she confided to them a brief outline of Nan's story, they were quite disposed to show the lonely little traveller every attention.

"We are only going to Calcutta, and back for the sake of the voyage, but it will be a great pleasure to us to look after Miss Lindsay," said Mrs. Allardice, and as she and her husband seemed to have taken quite a fancy to her pretty Nan, Nell felt relieved.

She found that the vessel not being at all full, Nan would have a cabin to herself, and as there was half an hour still before the warning bell sounded, Miss Lester said she should like to go and see it. When she had shut the door on herself and her friend she took Nan's hand in hers and squeezed it affectionately.

"Dear, I am so glad. I wouldn't say a word to you till I had seen the cabin. Now you see that woman was utterly wrong, the sofa is not red velvet; if she was wrong in one thing she would be in all."

"And the cabin is not very small," said Nan; "perhaps after all, Nell, it was just a mere chance that she guessed I was going to take a voyage, and the rest was all pure imagination."

"Any way," said Nell, practically, "she is quite out of it. Now, Nan, promise me you won't lie awake at night fancying the ship is on fire."

Nan gave the required promise, her spirits had risen perceptibly, and she could even smile when she said good bye to Nell.

The last glimpse Miss Lester had of her friend was standing at the side of the vessel waving her pocket handkerchief in adieu. Mr. and Mrs. Allardice were close to her, and Nell felt quite sure they would remember their promise and be good to the lonely little traveller.

But how she missed Nan on those first days of the New Year. Her friend's loss had made a blank in her home life which even hard work and gradual success could not fill.

## CHAPTER VI.

SIR DENZIL TREFUSIS had relations in England though he seldom spoke of them to his wife. His mother was hale and hearty still, she lived in the dower house with an unmarried daughter. The second son, Archie, was rector of the parish, and had given hostages to fortune in the shape of a wife and olive branches.

Another son was a barrister in London; so take it altogether, Sir Denzil could not complain of dearth of kindred, but he had been abroad so many years that he hardly counted as one of themselves to the others. His mother loved him dearly, and was proud to speak of "my son, the judge," but to his sisters he was almost a stranger, while both the rector and the barrister felt they had very little in common with Denzil.

He was not only the eldest son, he was the wealthy one. The Trefusis property was strictly entailed, besides, it had come to Sir Hugh so late in life that he had had no time to save a provision out of it for his younger children. Archie and Douglas had not a sixpence but what they earned; their sisters were portionless, and Lady Mary Trefusis herself (though an Earl's daughter), had only the five hundred a year with which her husband had charged the estate for her benefit, so that, as Mrs. Manderville, the married daughter once observed, Denzil was the only rich member of the family.

Lady Mary rejoiced when she heard of his marriage. It had struck her on his last visit to England that Denzil was growing hard. She wrote a very kindly welcome to the young wife; but Idonie never answered her letter, and so the correspondence was not continued.

The family place was in Essex, as far north as it could be to remain in that county at all. Sir Denzil had made his mother the offer of remaining at the Hall, but as he quite forgot to offer her also an increased income, she was forced to decline, and removed to the pretty old-fashioned dower house in the village known as River View, which straightway became a favourite gathering-place for her sons and daughters, while the grandchildren thought no place could be so delightful as her large, rambling garden.

Winter was not nearly over. February was proving true to his East Anglian name of "February fill dyke," and Lady Mary sat at her writing-table with a very perplexed face and several puckers in the broad white brow, which was crowned with soft, silvery hair; for though only sixty-five Lady Mary looked quite an old lady, and would have scorned any device for prolonging her youth.

A large fire burnt in the old-fashioned grate, and there was some knitting on a little gipsy table not far from it, but Lady Mary was not inclined to work this morning. She had a letter which required an answer, and how to write that answer troubled her.

The rector came in unannounced. At thirty-five Archie Trefusis looked wonderfully young for his age. No one would have guessed how few years divided him from his stately elder brother.

"What's the matter, mother, you look bothered?"

"And I feel so," replied Lady Mary. "If you are not in a hurry Archie, sit down and I'll tell you all about it."

"I'm in no hurry, mother, I hope there's not bad news of Denzil. I heard the Indian mail was in."

"There's news. I don't know if you'll call it bad. It seems he's in trouble about his wife; he wants to send her home."

"He has mentioned her very little in his last letters, or indeed since the boy's death," said the rector. "I began to fear it was not a happy marriage."

"I begin to fear so, now. He writes that Idonie seemed so lonely he sent for Alice Grant on a long visit, but that his wife took a positive dislike to her, and actually left her home and refused to return till Alice had gone."

Mr. Trefusis smiled.

"Well, mother, I saw Alice Grant five years ago, and I am quite sure I couldn't stand her on a long visit, and my Nora said she was the most

odious girl she had ever met, so I can't condemn Idonie."

"But to leave her home," and gentle Lady Mary looked horrified, "could anything excuse that?"

"Well," said Archie, pleasantly, "I believe in India it is extremely difficult to get rid of guests who like their quarters. Possibly it occurred to Lady Trefusis that if she left home Alice could not remain alone with Denzil, and so it was the best way of being free of her. But I don't think Denzil ought to write against his wife seeing we are strangers to her."

"He doesn't. I think you had better read his letter, Archie. I must answer it before the post goes out, and I can't decide what to say."

It was a long letter, and probably the most confidential one Denzil Trefusis had written for years. It was penned after the terror and anxiety of Idonie's illness, when the doctor had at last pronounced her out of danger, and declared that with care and good nursing she would soon be her old self. Perhaps in the revulsion of thankfulness Denzil's reserve had broken down, and he had felt relief in pouring out his story.

He screened Alice Grant chivalrously from all blame—which was rather a pity, as naturally it made his mother think hardly of Idonie—but said her visit had been a miserable failure, and that his wife had actually gone to her uncle's house, because she objected to his cousin.

Arrived at Colonel Vivian's she had had a long and serious illness, but she was now convalescent and he had to make plans for the future. The doctor assured him that Idonie must not remain in India, she could not stand a longer residence there without severe injury to her health. It was impossible for him to leave his post before the following October. Under these circumstances he thought of sending his wife to England as soon as she was able to travel and he wanted his mother either to receive Idonie as a visitor, or else to go to Trefusis Hall, and remain there with his wife until he could return to England.

He owned he had not yet spoken to Idonie on the subject. She was so weak that the doctor feared the excitement of discussion or of long expectation. He thought, in all probability, he should send her by the first steamer after he had obtained her consent to the voyage. He would cable the name of the vessel, and he hoped either Archie or Douglas would go to meet his wife and escort her either to Trefusis Hall or River View, according to his mother's decision. He enclosed a draft for three hundred pounds, and he begged Lady Mary's kindness for his wife, whom he spoke of with such affection as convinced the rector that if the marriage had proved unhappy, love at least had not been wanting on his brother's side.

"This is February. She can hardly be here for another month. You will have plenty of time for preparation."

"I don't want to make preparations. If she comes here she must take us as we are. Nothing will induce me to go back to the Hall. Suppose Idonie took a dislike to me, as she did to Alice Grant, she might be thinking of some expedient to get rid of me."

Archie laughed.

"You are very hard on her, mother."

"I am not. You know, Archie, how I felt, leaving the Hall. Why should I go back to it for a few weeks to be turned out again?"

"Then the matter is simple. Have Idonie here!"

"But I don't want her here, Archie," coaxingly. "Couldn't you and Nora take her in?"

"My dear mother! If the Rectory were built of India-rubber, so that it could be stretched for the occasion, we should be delighted; but think what a crowded house it is, what quiet would there be for anyone in delicate health, and would it be kind to take a childless mother to a house full of little folks, two of them exactly the age of the babies she lost?"

"Then I suppose she must come here," Lady Mary replied; "but I know we shall not get on."

"Oh, yes, you will, you get on with everyone, mother; and, besides, she is Denzil's wife."

"And hasn't made him happy."  
"That may be only your fancy. Now, mother, confess you are longing to see Idonie, and that there is nothing you and Hilda will enjoy more than petting her."

"She is only twenty-three," said Lady Mary, in a gentler tone, "and since her marriage she has lost father and mother, besides two brothers and her own little ones. Perhaps we can't expect her to be very cheerful, Archie."

"And Alice Grant would act like a sort of perpetual blither on me," put in the Rector. "Well, I shall tell Nora Lady Trefusis will be here soon, and she must come and help you make ready."

Lady Mary's doubts once conquered she allowed herself to enjoy the bustle of preparations. Hilda, the daughter who lived with her, was thirty-nine, grave and thoughtful, but kind and good to the core. But for leaving her mother alone Miss Trefusis would have become a hospital nurse. As it was she had a year's training before her father's death, and now she was quite a ministering angel to her family and friends in times of illness.

"If Idonie does not get strong with your mother's petting and Hilda's nursing her case must be hopeless," said pretty Mrs. Trefusis to her husband. "Do you know, Archie, I am getting so curious to see her, it's wonderful how very little we know about her."

"You see, Denzil was never a communicative fellow, his letters are just chronicles of bare facts, and you know we have never seen him since the marriage."

"And she has never written."  
"No, she left the mother's letter of welcome unanswered; but she was a mere child in those days, and it does want some courage to write to relations you have never seen. An old chum of Denzil's (he's dead now) told me Idonie was the loveliest creature he had ever seen, but grief and ill-health may have impaired her beauty."

"And she is very rich."  
"Not except as Denzil's wife. She was portionless."

"Then she won't look down on me! But what an important person she has been in India."

"A baronet's wife, with twenty thousand a-year, and her husband an important judge, herself a beauty and belle of the neighbourhood. It's enough to turn her head."

"I never knew Trefusis was worth all that."  
"It isn't, but Denzil has a large official salary, and a godfather left him a cool hundred thousand. He never spent much till he married, so if I say he has twenty thousand a-year I am well within the figure."

"And I don't believe he is a bit happier than we are."

"With six hundred! I doubt if he is as happy. I have no fear of your grudging Idonie her wealth, Nora. You and I are too happy."

Two very pretty rooms were prepared at River View for Lady Trefusis. Lady Mary felt her daughter-in-law would be sure to bring a maid, and dreaded the latter almost as much as Idonie. All the Trefusis' friends and acquaintances heard of the expected arrival, and there was general rejoicing that before the end of the year Sir Denzil himself would be at home, and Trefusis Hall alive again after its long sleep.

Mrs. Mandeville came home—they all called Trefusis home—for a week end, just to discuss the great event.

"I am sure we shall be fond of Idonie," she said, kindly, "and perhaps when she is stronger there will be another baby. It must be hard on you, Archie, to be in such an equivocal position."

"I don't feel the hardship," he said, smiling. "I never expected to be Denzil's heir, and I hope with all my heart he and Idonie will have half-a-dozen boys and girls of their own. I can assure you I have never counted on Trefusis coming to me or to my little Ronald either."

Ronald Trefusis was seven, a beautiful boy, and the darling of the whole family. Only his mother knew how hard she had found it since the death of Idonie's last baby to prevent people

telling Ronald he might one day be master of Trefusis.

"I am going to meet Idonie," said the Rector, cheerfully, "unless the steamer arrives late on a Saturday, in which case Douglas must replace me."

"But you don't know that she has sailed yet."  
"Oh yes, we do. Denzil cabled a week ago just the name of the vessel; it was the *Atalanta*."

"You mean that Lady Trefusis sailed a week ago?"

"No. He waited to cable till he felt sure mother had had his letter. His wire only said, 'Sailed in *Atalanta*; letter by same to explain.'"

"And as the letters come overland from Brindisi, you will get the letter long before you must start to meet the ship. I can't see quite what there is to explain."

"Well, we shall know soon. The ship is due at Brindisi next week."

But though Mr. Trefusis examined the papers every day, he found no mention of the arrival of the *Atalanta* at Brindisi. He grew gradually more and more uneasy, and at last he went up to London, and unknown to his mother called at the offices of the steamship company.

He met with little satisfaction. The *Atalanta* had not been heard of. "She ought to have reached Brindisi ten days before. She had not called at the port she was due at next before Brindisi. She was, in fact, overdue even in London. There was no doubt there was grave cause for anxiety, and yet it might be that she was only slightly disabled, and had had to put in somewhere to rest. They would communicate with Mr. Trefusis as soon as they had any news of the missing ship."

Days passed, until it was impossible to keep the truth from Lady Mary. She took it very much to heart, saying more than once it seemed like a judgment on her for her unwillingness to receive poor Idonie. She grew quite pale and careworn, and anxiety about her made her children wish more than ever that news of the missing ship would arrive.

It came at last in a letter sent by private messenger from the London office.

They had received a telegram from Brindisi, a homeward-bound steamer putting in there reported they had two men of the *Atalanta* crew on board. These were picked up in mid-ocean from an open boat.

They declared that a fire broke out on board the steamer, and that the captain ordered the boats to be got ready, and despatched the women and children first with only enough men to navigate the craft. Four sailors had manned the last boat, two were washed overboard the next day, and the passengers succumbed to the hardships and privations. The survivors who lived to be picked up declared they saw the *Atalanta* blown up. They were at a safe distance, but the report of the explosion when the fire reached the hold, where some powder was, was so loud they could hear it perfectly. They believed that the other boat had every chance of reaching some port, or meeting some steamer that would take the passengers on board. The two sailors would be in London in a week, and might be able to state definitely whether Lady Trefusis was in either of the boats. If she remained on the ship there could be no doubt she had perished.

(To be continued.)

By the Bertillon system of identifying criminals employed in France, the length and width of the head are taken, also the length and width of the left, middle, and little fingers, the length of the left foot, of the left forearm, of the right ear, the height of the figure, the measurement of the outstretched arms and of the trunk when seated. It is said that no instance of all these measurements coinciding in two persons has ever been known.

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## IF I BUT KNEW.

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### CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE dreaming of the purport of the story Rhoda had to tell, Kenward Monk drew near. For a moment Rhoda's great sombre eyes looked into his as though she would read his very soul.

"Tell me over again that you will forgive me no matter what it is that I have to tell you."

"I have already given you that promise over and over again," he declared. "Surely you don't want me to take an oath to that effect?"

"Not if your solemn promise is strong enough to bind you."

"You forget that you are wasting time, Rhoda," he said, good-humouredly.

"It will not take me long to tell my sad little story," she answered, with a half sob; "and, oh, what a world of comfort it will be for me to know that you will care for me no matter what the world may think. When you hear my story you will understand the great temptation, and will not judge me too cruelly."

"To begin with, my mother and I lived with a very wealthy family in Summerville. My mother was housekeeper, and I—well, I had no regular position there, until, owing to the meagre salary they paid my mother, I was compelled to learn telegraphy, and found a position at the station. To gain my mother's consent to do this was extremely hard."

"They will not be pleased, Rhoda," she said, piteously.

"What do the Stantons care for you or me?" I answered, bitterly. "Only to make you toll year in and year out, for a pittance so meagre that it scarcely keeps body and soul together!"

"But they allow me to keep you with me, my dear child. That is everything to a mother who is poor," she sighed.

"I am not a child any longer," I cried. "I am quite sixteen. I must be making money now, if ever, to help you!"

"But what can you do?" she asked.  
"When I told her my plans she looked at me dubiously."

"Surely Mrs. Stanton would not object," I declared.

"But she did object. To my surprise she flew into a terrible rage when I summoned courage enough to go to the morning-room the next day and asked to speak to her."

"I unfolded to the cold, proud woman my plans to make a living. She did not wait to hear me through, but flew into such a passion of rage that I drew back in terror."

"I have different plans for you entirely, Rhoda Cairn," she said. "Go to your mother. I told her my plans scarcely half an hour ago. She will unfold them to you. Mind, they must be carried out by you, or your mother and you will suffer. Your father owed us a sum of money before he died, and during the past years your mother has worked to pay us off. Over one half yet remains to be paid. Your mother's name is signed to your father's notes of indebtedness, and she is responsible for them. If I pressed for payment and she could not pay, she could be thrown into a debtors' prison."

"I sobbed aloud in my terror: 'Oh, Mrs. Stanton, if this indeed be true, there is more need than ever for me to earn money to pay off my mother's debts.'"

"There is another way in which you can pay them off," she answered.

"Oh, how!" I cried, falling on my knees and clasping my hands.

"The answer came like a crash of thunder from a clear sky."

"By marrying my nephew," she said, harshly. "I sprang to my feet in terror. Marry anyone! I, who was only a child!"

"My mother would not consent to anything like that, even—"

"She will be forced to consent!" was the harsh reply. "My nephew will be here in a week."

"I found my mother walking her room, wringing her hands and tearing her hair. Her excite-



ment was so great that for a moment I was terrified.

"Has she told you all, Rhoda?" she asked, in terror.

"Yes, mother," I answered.

"And did she tell you what this nephew of hers was like?"

"No," I replied, greatly puzzled by her manner.

"She shuddered as with a terrible chill.

"Listen, Rhoda," she said, in a strained, awful voice: "Her nephew is such a horrid creature, that to be hated he needs but to be seen. He is a hunchback—and an idiot—has a touch of insanity about him. Except the first few years of his life, he has been confined in an asylum. This nephew has a bachelor uncle, who has declared his intention to make the young man his heir if he marries when he is twenty-one. Otherwise the great fortune goes to another branch of the family. They would make a victim of you, wreck your beautiful young life for their own ambitious aims. It will be six months before he is of age. But the marriage shall never be, my darling. Your young life shall never be sacrificed by these inhuman Shylocks. When the hour comes, we will die together."

"I begged Mrs. Stanton to let me think the matter over," went on Rhoda, "until it was time for her nephew to come to her home, and to let me earn a little money in the meantime at the telegraph office in the station, as soon as I became proficient. She did not wish to thwart me, and very gradually consented. I cannot tell you of the days and weeks that passed after that. No girl in the whole world was as lonely and desolate as I was. My terror deepened when I saw my mother fall day by day before my eyes."

"I had had a lonely, desolate childhood, uncheered by youthful companions, but I dared not think what life would be to me if I were to lose my mother. I had never felt that the old gray stone mansion was home to me, for I never was allowed to go or come except by the rear gate. The attic room I shared with my mother was dismal enough. The summer sun shone fiercely into it, and the rain leaked in through the shingles. The wind sobbed drearily through it, making uncanny sounds when the dead leaves rustled against the windows. In winter the snow drifted into it through the crevices. It was dismal, but my mother dared not complain."

"The girls in the village degraded not to notice me, and I shrank from them, for they made me feel that it was almost a crime to be only a housekeeper's daughter. I worked very earnestly, and, to my great joy, when the telegraph operator was called upon to fill another position, I was given his place."

"One day my mother met me with a white, awful face."

"Mrs. Stanton's nephew has arrived with a valet," she cried, under her breath.

"But the six months are not up, mother," I cried. "It wants a fortnight to that time."

"He has come to stay until you make your decision."

"The servants were all very reticent that night about the new-comer. For three days he remained in his room, and they heard the sound of laughter, mingled with words of admonition in the voice of the man who had accompanied him."

"One day, in hurrying to my work a little earlier than was my wont, cutting through a path in the garden that was seldom used, I saw a sight that I shall never forget while life lasts."

"I had paused to look at the budding lilacs, though I dared not break off even the smallest stem."

"There, standing directly in my path, were two men—one in the garb of an attendant, and the other—oh! how shall I picture him. His body was small and shrunken, seeming hardly able to bear the broad, misshapen shoulders. He appeared to have no neck. On his shoulders was set a massive head, with a face so ferocious that for a moment I stood rooted to the spot and gazed spell-bound at it and the shaggy hair covering the big head. His eyes were glaring, like those of a hungry animal, and his fang-like teeth protruded through his lips."

"They were wrangling over a bottle."

"When the attendant succeeded in taking it by main force from the talon-like fingers of the dwarf, the misshapen thing, which hardly bore resemblance to a human being, sprang upon his companion with the fury of a tiger."

"Almost fainting with terror, I fled from the spot."

"And this was the being that Mrs. Stanton had decided I was to marry in order to save the family fortune."

"Oh, Heaven! the horror of it. Death a thousand times over would have been preferable to that."

"How could I stand at the altar and promise to obey a creature the very sight of whom filled me with disgust and terror?"

"I fled through the village, not daring to look behind me, and never stopping until I reached the telegraph office."

"It was little wonder that I made strange mistakes during the hour that followed."

"It was during this time that Mrs. Cairn stepped up to the window and called for a blank."

"Although her name was the same as mine, yet we were in no way related to each other. They were wealthy people, I had heard, and were summering in the village."

"Without waiting to see the message sent, the lady hurried out of the office. A great sigh broke from my lips as I noted the well-filled purse that she carried, the magnificent diamonds she wore on her hands, and which swung sparkling from her ears. Any one of the gems she wore would have been a fortune to a poor girl like me."

"As she crossed the railway track in the direction of the post office, she must have seen the train bearing down upon her from around the curve of the road."

"However, she fainted away from fright, and lay directly on the track. I had seen it all from my window, and I sprang to her rescue and dragged her by main force from the track just in time to save her from destruction, as the ponderous locomotive just then thundered by. Mrs. Cairn's gratitude was great when she recovered consciousness."

"How shall I ever reward you, my good girl?" she cried.

"I need no reward," I answered. "I would have done that for any one!"

"You must be rewarded," she declared. "My husband is coming from—to-night, and he will insist upon doing handsomely by you."

"I was living at home with my poor old mother, and when I went home that evening and told her the story, she wept like a child."

"You did a noble action, Rhoda," she said; adding slowly, "The Cairns are very rich. I should not be surprised if they made you a handsome present. I once knew a gentleman who gave a lad twenty pounds for saving his son from drowning. Perhaps they may do as well by you."

"You see, we were very poor—mother and I—and twenty pounds seemed a great deal to us."

"How much good we could do with that sum," my mother said. "We could get a little ahead in our rent, and spare enough out of it to get a new dress for you."

"I clasped my hands. A new dress! Oh, surely it would be madness to hope for such a thing!"

"That evening Mrs. Cairn sent for me to come to the grand cottage where she was stopping. Her husband, a very deaf old gentleman, sat at the window as I entered. They both thanked me in the most eager and grateful fashion."

"We have been thinking the matter over," said Mrs. Cairn, "and I have come to the conclusion that I will do something handsome for you—give you a pleasure such as you have never experienced in your young life."

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Mrs. Cairn paused and looked smiling at me for a moment or two."

"So great is the treat I have in store for you

that you will never forget it. But Mr. Cairn and I disagree slightly as to what it shall be. We now lay the proposition before you. Which would you prefer—have one hundred pounds in cash, or be taken to Brighton for a season, have lovely dresses, and stop at a great hotel, under my protection, and have as fine a time as any young girl at the seaside?"

"I cried aloud in the exuberance of my joy. I had read of the lives of other young girls at the seaside and this opportunity seemed like the opening out of a fairy land to me. You will not blame me, Kenward; I was young and romantic. I had never seen anything of life or its pleasures. A season at Brighton! The very thought of it fairly took away my breath."

"Oh, I will go to Brighton!" I cried. "Then the great dream of my life will be realised."

"My husband thought you would prefer the money, but I knew that you would prefer the pleasure."

"Half wild with joy, I went home and told my mother the wonderful news. She shook her head sadly."

"We are so poor you should have chosen the money, Rhoda," she sobbed. "Such a great gift is offered you but once in a life time."

"But, mother," I cried, "think of boarding at a grand hotel and doing nothing for two or three months! There will be no getting up in the morning, no hurrying to the telegraph office, with two slices of bread and butter and a piece of cold meat in my pocket for luncheon, no worrying through the day, seeing the old goods trains rolling past the window, and all that sort of thing. And then my walking back over the dusty road at night, too disheartened to look up, with the everlasting tick, tick, tick of the telegraph instrument in my ears. I am so young, and we are so poor, do not scold me for wanting to enjoy life just for once, if only a few short weeks. Then I will be content to spend all the remainder of my life drudging away in the telegraph office, for I could not marry that misshapen monster, Mrs. Stanton's nephew!"

"But what does Mrs. Cairn want you to do for her, Rhoda? Are you to be her maid?"

"Oh, no, mother!" I cried, with a hysterical laugh. "I am to be a real lady, wear fine clothes, and sit under the porch reading novels, or promenade on the sea-shore, from the time I get up in the morning till I retire at night. I shall have pin-money too, they say, and that I will send home to you. So everything will go on with you while I am away as it did while I was here."

"We had never been parted from each other, mother and I, and oh! it wrung her heart to say 'Yes.'"

"But after much pleading on my part she consented to let me go. She made one proviso, however, and that was—I was not to fall in love with anyone whom I might meet."

"That is not likely," I answered, with a gay laugh. But she shook her head, wondering if Mrs. Stanton would allow me to go. To our intense surprise, however, she consented readily, being actually glad to get me out of the house for a few weeks."

"Oh, I cannot tell you of my delight when I saw the wonderful dresses that Mrs. Cairn purchased for me, saying that they were all my own forever after. She took me to Brighton with her. As my name was the same as theirs, everyone took it for granted that I was a niece of theirs, instead of their *protégée* for a few short weeks, a report which the Cairns did not trouble themselves to contradict."

"In my cup of joy there were times when I tasted less which were most bitter. I wanted to be a lady," sobbed the girl, drooping her head, until it rested on her hands; "but I never dreamed that one must pay a penalty for folly. The young girls with whom I was brought in contact at the Grand Hotel, although they were friends, nay, companions of mine, always felt that there was something about me which they could not understand."

"I was with them, yet, somehow, not of their world. I could not understand their pleasures, their lives. I was in constant terror lest they should find out my terrible secret. There was

scarcely an hour but that I was making some dreadful mistake.

"I knew nothing of music, the fine arts, French, literature, or any of the accomplishments, and they seemed to realise my defects and to commence to wonder at them.

"Oh! it was torture enough for a life-time, Kenward, and many a time, in the solitude of my own room, I cried out to Heaven that I was sorry I had ever left the little telegraph office, to be a lady for a few short weeks, only to return to the routine of toil again when the fleeting summer days were over. But when I saw you I could not help loving you, Kenward. Now you know why the Cairns will not search for me.

"They will be surprised at first when I do not return, and others will be more surprised when they make the announcement that I am nothing to them. The wealthy heiresses will be shocked that they ever associated with me, and after the usual nine days' wonder, the matter will die out of their thoughts. But, oh! I shall never want to be a lady again, Kenward—never again!"

She had told her story hastily, impetuously, not daring to look into her lover's face until she had concluded. Then she raised her great dark eyes slowly. But what she saw in her husband's face made her cry out in terror.

"Oh, Kenward! Kenward! what is the matter!" she cried, in alarm.

He sat before her as though he were petrified. The glassy, horrified stare in his eyes cut to her heart like the thrust of a sword.

"I married you for love. You have helped me to escape Mrs. Stanton's dreaded nephew," she faltered.

By a wonderful effort he found his voice.

"Not the heiress of the Cairns!" he cried, hoarsely, as though he was unable to realise the truth.

"You do not love me the less for what I have done, do you?" she cried, catching her breath with a sharp sob.

Before he could find words to answer, breakfast was announced.

"Go in and eat your breakfast, Rhoda," he said. "I have some important matters which I must attend to that will keep me busy for the next hour to come. Don't wait for me. After you have finished your breakfast they will show you to a room which I have already secured for you. Lie down and rest until you hear from me. You will need all your strength to meet that which is before you." And his brows darkened ominously.

"But you, Kenward!" she said, anxiously. "Surely you must be very hungry, my dearest husband," the girl-bride, answered, fondly.

"I could not eat a mouthful to save my life!" he exclaimed, almost savagely. He fairly hurried her along to the dining-room, and past the polite waiter, who was bowing the way obsequiously.

"You will not be gone long, Kenward, dear?" she cried, clinging to him lovingly.

He answered her in a monosyllable which she could not quite catch. The next moment he was gone, and she was left alone with her conflicting thoughts.

She was young, and youth has an appetite all its own. She was very tired with all she had gone through the last few hours, and the appetizing breakfast spread before her caused her to forget everything else.

Like all young, healthy girls, she ate heartily; then she rose from the table and re-entered the little sitting-room to wait for the coming of Kenward to ask him to send a telegram to her mother.

"Shall I show you to your room, miss?" asked the waiter.

"No," she answered. "I will wait here."

"Then here is a letter which has just been handed me to give to you."

She opened it, and found that it was from Kenward.

For one moment Rhoda Cairn looked with an expression of puzzled wonder at the letter which the hotel waiter had handed her.

It was in Kenward's handwriting; she saw that at once.

What could he write to her about, when he had been away from her scarcely an hour! He pro-

bably wished to remind her to be sure to be ready when he arrived.

"How he loves me!" she murmured, a pink flush stealing into the dimpled cheeks. "What a happy girl I ought to be that my lover loves me so well!"

The waiter had gone back to attend to his duty. She saw that she was all alone, and with a quick action she raised the envelope to her lips with her little white hands and kissed it—ay, kissed passionately the sword which was to slay her the next moment.

She would not go to the room which they were preparing for her, preferring the early morning sunlight in the white and gold room.

Seating herself in a cosy arm-chair close by the open window, Rhoda Cairn opened the letter which was to be her death-warrant, and read as follows:

"Rhoda, I suppose the contents of this note will give you something of a shock; but it is best to know the truth now than later on. I shall come to the point at once, that you may not be kept in suspense.

"The truth is, Rhoda, that your confession has knocked all our little plans on the head. To write plainly, when I thoughtlessly married you it was under the impression that you were the niece of the Cairns—their future heiress. I have not told you much about myself in the past, but I am obliged to do so now.

"I am not at all a rich fellow. I am working along as best I can, living on what people call wit—and expectations, which make me a veritable slave to the whims of a capricious old aunt and uncle.

"They have decided that I must marry a girl who has money. I should not dare to present a portionless bride to them. In such a case all my future prospects would be ruined. I must add that I have a still greater surprise for you. On leaving you I purchased this morning's paper, and the first item that met my eye was the absconding of the man who performed the ceremony for us last night. It appears that he was turned out of office some two days before, impeached, as it were, for embezzling money.

"All power was taken from him to act in the capacity of registrar. Thus the ceremony which we thought made us one is not binding. You are free as air. No one will be any the wiser, and you are none the worse for our little escapade—romance—call it what you will.

"A little affair in the life of a telegraph operator will not set the heart of the great world throbbing with excitement. I am sorry affairs have turned out this way: for, upon my word, I could have liked you. There is but one thing to do under the circumstances: that is, to part company. I advise you to go quietly back and marry the rich lover Mrs. Stanton has selected for you. That will be better than dragging your life away in a telegraph office.

"This is all I have to say, and thus I take French leave of you. Forget me as quickly as you can, little girl. I am nearly dead broke, but I am generous enough to share what money I have with you. Enclosed you will find a five-pound note—quite enough to take you back to the village which you should never have left.—Yours in great haste,

"KENWARD."

Once, twice, thrice—ay, a dozen times—the girl read the heartless letter through until every word was scorched into her brain in letters of fire, then it fluttered from her hands to the floor.

She sat quite still, like one petrified by a sudden awful horror; then, creeping to the window, she raised the sash, and looking up into Heaven through the glinting sunshine, asked the angels in heaven to tell her if it was true that her husband she had just wedded had deserted her.

## CHAPTER IX.

AGAIN the poor child picked up the cruel letter; but she could not read a line of it, though she sat looking at the written page.

"Not his wife!" she moaned over and over again, clutching her little hands over her heart.

Oh, Heaven! the play of it, the awful pain of it. She had pictured to herself how she should bound into her mother's arms and tell her that there was no need of toll for either of them now, for she had wedded a young husband who would take care of them both—who would settle up that debt which hung like a pall over them, and she would not be forced into a marriage with Mrs. Stanton's horrible nephew. But she was not Kenward's wife, even after all that had taken place.

With a sudden frenzy she tore the letter into a thousand shreds, and flung the pieces from her through the open window.

Would her poor, sick mother's heart break when she told her all? When she went home, would they force her to marry the terrible being she abhorred!

Home! Ah, Heaven! what a mockery. She had only a shelter. If she refused to marry the horrible hunchback, her mother and herself would not even have that.

How could she face the future? The very thought of it made the blood chill in her veins.

"Oh, Kenward, death from your hands would have been easier than that!" she moaned.

The next moment there was a heavy fall, and one of the housemaids, passing the door, saw the girl lying in a heap.

They did all in their power to restore her to consciousness; but it was quite useless. When they had tended her an hour over her, they became alarmed.

Where was her husband! Why did he not return! A physician in the hotel did all in his power, but without avail.

"It looks like a case of brain-fever," he said, "or perhaps typhoid. Either is dangerous. I should advise that she be sent to a hospital."

"That husband of hers has not settled his bill!" exclaimed the proprietor, his face darkening angrily.

"It is my opinion," said the doctor, "that it is best not to await the return of the young gentleman who accompanied her here. In short, it is my opinion that he has deserted her."

"And my own as well," returned the proprietor of the hotel. "I heard no quarrel, though," he added, thoughtfully. "Suave, polished rascals like the fellow who left her here are too shrewd to make a scene."

Then with a resounding thud he brought down his strong hand on the back of a chair.

"Hold! I have it!" he cried. "He went into the library, leaving her upstairs waiting for breakfast, and wrote a long letter, which he ordered to be delivered to her at once. Bless me, how strange it is that I did not have an inkling of the truth at the time!"

A search for the letter did not disclose it.

"I saw some white scraps floating from the window as I entered," said the physician.

In less time than it takes to tell it, poor, hapless Rhoda Cairn, the victim of such a cruel misfortune, and a sadder fate yet to follow, was taken to the hospital. The waning summer days drifted slowly by, and autumn came with its dead, rustling leaves and sobbing winds, before Rhoda Cairn opened her eyes to consciousness and turned them full upon the white-capped nurse bending over her.

"Where is Kenward?" she asked, faintly.

"You mean the young man who left you at the hotel?" queried the nurse, who had heard the young girl's sad story; adding: "He never came back to inquire for you. He has deserted you. He did not care whether or not the shock would kill you. If there was ever a heartless scoundrel on the face of the earth, he is that one!"

The lovely white young face never changed its pallor, the dark eyes never left the grim countenance of the nurse.

"Where am I? Who are you? How do I happen to be here?"

The nurse briefly related what the clerk of the hotel had told her of the affair—of the young man who had brought her there, making arrangements for a magnificent suite of rooms—how he had gone off without tasting the fine breakfast he had ordered, and went down into the city.



an I wrote a long letter, which he said must be delivered to her as soon as she came out of the dining-room.

The girl's white face darkened suddenly—darkened with such a look of deadly hatred that the nurse recoiled.

"I remember, I remember it all!" she cried, trying to rise; but, utterly exhausted, she fell back upon the pillow.

"There, there! do not excite yourself!" exclaimed the nurse, quickly. "You have had brain-fever. For two months we have watched over you, thinking each day would be your last; but you've been gradually on the mend. If you don't have a relapse, we ought to have you up and about in a fortnight. Here, take this."

Before Rhoda Cairn could ask for her mother, the nurse had forced her to swallow a draught of medicine, which caused her to sink back into a deep sleep.

And while she slept, during the week which followed, health and strength came slowly back to the girl.

What Rhoda's thoughts were as consciousness drifted back to her no one could tell. The nurse did not like the set look on the white face or the terrible despair that settled in the dark eyes.

"I want to leave this place at once," said the girl, attempting to rise from her cot.

"No, no; you must not do so!" exclaimed the nurse. "It would be dangerous in your case."

"But I want my mother," moaned Rhoda, piteously.

When the nurse made her rounds an hour later, to her great consternation she found that Cot 27 was empty. The girl had flown! The most diligent search through the city failed to elicit the slightest trace of her whereabouts.

The clothes she had worn when she came there had been left in the little closet near her cot.

"It is my opinion that she has fled to the river," the nurse said.

"Why do you think that?" asked one of her assistants.

But the nurse would not reply. Whatever her thoughts were, she kept them to herself, shaking her head and muttering over and over again:

"Poor thing! She is so young! The rascal who deserted her ought to be hung! Kenward!" she muttered. "If ever I come across a man by that name, I shall not be able to keep from thinking that he is the one who deserted her."

She went on with her duties; but she could not forget the white face, so lovely in its pathetic woe, could not forget the girl who had fled from the hospital under the cover of darkness.

While they were searching for the hapless girl, Rhoda was only a few streets away from them.

When the nurse had refused to allow her to leave the place, she told herself over and over again that she must go—that she must see her mother. If she had a telegram sent that she was in the hospital, her mother would die from sheer fright. No; she must go to her. It was just at that hour when dusk was creeping up and the nurses were busy that she knew she could dress herself and slip out without attracting much attention.

A shudder of terror passed over her as her weak and trembling hands encountered the silk dress, the magnificent silk cloak, and the costly hat, with its drooping plumes, which she had worn at the ill-fated fancy-pieces masquerade.

Who was she that she should don these "trappings of wealth"? They seemed to torture her. She quickly made up her mind as to her course of action. As she hurried aimlessly down the street, caring little where she went, she was attracted by a sign—

"Old and New Clothes Bought and Sold."

A little French woman presided behind the counter. She made a very low courtesy as her richly dressed customer stepped into the dark little store.

"She has come to inquire after some finery she has lost and believes her maid has stolen," was her mental comment.

She could scarcely believe her ears when the girl said,—

"Will you buy my clothes, madame?" She recovered her self-possession almost immediately.

"Dear me! You have come almost at the worst season of the year. We are already overstocked, and I am at my wife's ends to know how we are to get rid of what we have on hand."

"But I am greatly in need of money," faltered Ida. "You can have my clothes at your own price."

"You will want some other clothes in exchange, won't you?"

"Yes," assented Ida, faintly. "Most anything will do me until I reach home."

"Then you don't live in the city?" she queried.

"No," answered the girl. "Almost fifty miles away."

"Ah," thought the woman, "it will not cost much money to take her there."

Then aloud:

"Would one pound, a black serge dress and jacket, and a little toque to match, satisfy you?"

"Anything will do," said the girl, wearily. "It will not matter much."

The place was so dark that she did not notice how shabby and old the clothes were which she received in exchange; and with the money in her hand, she turned and walked wearily out of the shop.

An hour later a little dark figure, ensconced in a corner of the car, was whirling rapidly towards Summerville.

She sat staring from the window with eyes that did not see, so intent was she with her own thoughts.

"I cannot marry Mrs. Stanton's nephew," she sobbed, under her breath. "It would be easier for me to die. But what shall I do to raise the money for which they hold my poor mother a veritable slave?"

She clasped her hands in piteous entreaty; but the soft, radiant moon and the golden stars to which she raised her eyes so appealingly could find no answer for her.

As the train slowed up at the station, she pulled her veil down closely. She hurriedly alighted and sped like a storm-driven swallow up the village street and along the high road, until, almost out of breath, she reached the Stanton's house. She stood transfixed for a moment at the gate.

What was there about the place that caused such a shudder to creep over her? What did the awful presentiment, as of coming evil, mean that took possession of her body and soul?

## CHAPTER X.

How weird the place looked, how gaunt and bare the great oak trees looked, looming up darkly against the moonlit sky! The dead leaves rustled across her path as she crept around to the side door.

She looked up at her mother's window, and another great chill crept over her. All was dark there. It had always been her mother's custom to place her lamp on the broad window-sill at night. Many a time it had been her beacon-light in cutting across lots from the station on evenings when she had been detained by her work. How strange it was that the light was not in the window to-night!

"Mother is not expecting me to-night," she said to herself, "that is the reason it is not there."

But ah, how she missed it! How her heart had yearned to behold it, with a yearning so great that it had been the most intense pain. She lifted the latch and entered tremblingly, hesitatingly. It had been over two months since her mother had heard from her. How had her patient, suffering mother lived through it!

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfluous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps, from Dr. HOAR, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth.

Did she watch the days come and go until she grew sick at heart with hope deferred? Watching eagerly for the letter that never came, until at last an apathy of despair settled over her?

Oh, how she would throw herself in that mother's arms, and sob out her pitiful story on her loving, faithful breast and tell her all—how she had thought herself a wife, only to learn that she had been duped, and then how she had been deserted by the man she had believed as true as the angels are above. She would cry out:

"Oh, pity and forgive me, mother, I was duped and deceived, sinned against. Though all the world should hold me guilty, you will believe me stainless through it all, and comfort me, wiping away my bitter tears with your gentle hand. Your gentle words will bid me lift my head from the dust in which it is bowed, and look the world in the face again."

As she crossed the hall she heard the sound of Mrs. Stanton's voice in a sharp, high key. Perhaps the horrible nephew was with her. She paused in a paroxysm of terror. She was talking to her husband, scolding him, rather.

"It isn't my fault that we lost the fortune," he was answering her meekly. "You brought your nephew out of the asylum too soon. You knew he would not be here a fortnight before he would do some terrible deed—burn the house down over our heads, or kill himself when the attendant was not watching, or some other horrible deed of that kind. When he did succeed in mutilating himself before any of us were aware of it, instead of sending him back to the asylum, to be cared for, you kept him here under lock and key, thinking to cure him yourself in a couple of months or so."

"Ah!" thought Rhoda, leaning faint and dizzy against the wall, "now I understand why Mrs. Stanton consented to let me go away. Anything to get me out of the house while she was curing the insane nephew whom she had vowed I must wed."

The next words, while they shocked her inexpressively, lifted a world of woe from her heart.

"Well, despite our watchfulness, he succeeded in killing himself at last; so there's the end of it. The fortune is lost, and there's no use in raving over it, and in venting your bitter wrath upon everything and everyone that comes within your range."

Mrs. Stanton's anger was so great that she could not utter a word. She flung open the door and dashed into the hall. The very first object that met her gaze was the cowering little figure leaning against the balustrade.

"You!" she cried, quite as soon as she could catch her breath. "How dare you come here, Rhoda Cairn, you wicked girl! I am amazed that you have the effrontery to face honest people after what you have done! We read all about it in the newspapers—how you ran away from Brighton with a gay, dashing fellow who soon after deserted you! Stop! don't attempt to tell me anything about it. I won't listen to a word. Get out of this house as quick as you can! Go, before I bid the servants throw you from the house!"

"But my mother! Surely you will let me see my mother!" sobbed the girl, piteously. "The whole wide world may be against me, but she will believe me guiltless! Please let me see her."

A laugh that was horrible to hear broke from Mrs. Stanton's thin lips.

"Your mother!" she sneered; "much you cared about her, or how your doings affected her. That article in the newspapers did the work, as you might have known it would. I carried the paper to her myself, and when she read it she fell to the floor with a bitter cry, and she never spoke again. It was her death-warrant!"

For one moment the girl looked at the woman with frightened eyes, as though she could not quite comprehend the full import of what the woman was saying.

"It killed your mother!" she repeated, pitifully. "You might have known it would. She died of a broken heart!"

A long low moan came from the girl's lips. The awful despair in the dark eyes would have

touched any other heart, even though it were made of stone; but in Mrs. Stanton's heart there was neither pity nor mercy.

"Go!" she repeated, threateningly, "and do not dare to ever darken my door again!"

"Will you tell me where you have buried my poor mother!" moaned Rhoda with bitter anguish.

"In the lot where the poor of the village are put," she answered, unfeelingly. "We had to have a mark put over her. You can easily find it. It's to the left hand corner, the last one on the row. It would be better for you, you shameless girl, if you were lying beside her rather than sink to the lowest depths of the road you are travelling. Go—go at once."

White as she would ever be in death, Rhoda Cairn turned and gilded out of the house without a word.

She had scarcely passed over the threshold ere a terrific crash of thunder, so violent that for an instant it seemed to firmly rend earth and sky, broke above her hapless head. This was followed by terrific flashes of lightning, that made the poor terrified child's heart almost stop beating. The wind roared hoarsely among the bare, leafless trees with demoniac fury, preasing a terrific storm.

"Oh, let me stay until the day breaks and the storm is over! For Heaven's sake, don't drive me out into the storm!" sobbed the girl, turning quickly and holding out her arms pitifully to the woman, who had come to the door to look out after her, to make sure she was really gone.

For answer the heavy oaken door was slammed rudely in her white face, and she heard the dull grating of the key in the lock.

She uttered no cry. She stood quite still in her blank despair. The wind rose, increasing in fury. Flash after flash of forked lightning leaped out of the black sky, peal after peal of terrific thunder rocked the trembling earth to and fro. The rain fell no longer in big drops, but swept the earth in great white sheets, as though the very flood-gates of heaven were opened wide to deluge the earth.

With trembling feet she crept down the broad path and out of the gate. She was drenched to the skin, and the chill October winds pierced through her thin wet clothes like the sharp cut of a knife. It did not matter much; nothing mattered for her any more. She was going to find her mother's grave, kneel down beside it, lay her tired head on the little green mound, and wait there for death to come to her, for surely Heaven would grant her prayer and in pity reach out His hand to her and take her home. There would be a home for her there where her mother was, even if all other doors were closed to her.

She had little difficulty in finding the place—a small inclosure in the rear of an old church that had fallen into decay and crumbling ruins many years ago—and by the blinding flashes of lightning, she found the grave of her mother—her poor, suffering mother, the only being who had ever loved her in the great, cold, desolate earth.

"Mother," she sobbed, laying her face on the cold, wet leaves that covered the mound, "mother, I have come to you to die. The world has gone all wrong with me. I never meant to go young. I do not know how it happened. Other young girls have married the lovers whom they thought Heaven had sent to them, and lived happy enough lives. I built such glorious air-castles of the home I should have, the handsome, strong young husband to love and to labour for me, and how you should live with me, mother, never having to work any more. But oh, mother, all my plans went wrong! I don't know why."

She listened for a reply, but none came from the silent mound, and she bowed her desolate young head, weeping passionate tears—tears that seemed to blister and burn her face as they fell, yet perhaps they saved her life. She wept until she was exhausted; but she who slept beneath did not hear; the lips of her who had loved the poor girl better than anything else in this life could not speak to comfort her, the cold

hands folded over each other could not part the heavy earth above them to reach out to clasp her or to rest for one brief moment on the bowed head.

Rhoda crouched there among the sleeping dead, her brain in a whirl; and the long night wore on. The storm subsided, the wind died away over the tossing trees and the far-off hills, and the rain ceased. Morning broke faint and gray in the eastern sky, and the flecks of crimson along the horizon preased a bright and gladsome day.

The station-master, hurrying along to his duties at that early hour, was startled to see a dark figure lying among the graves. In a moment he was bending over the prostrate form. He could not distinguish in the dim light whose grave it was upon which the poor creature was lying, but as he lifted the slender figure, and the faint, early light fell upon the white, beautiful young face, he started back with an exclamation of horror.

"Good Heavens! It is little Rhoda Cairn!"

For an instant he was incapable of action, his surprise was so intense.

"Dead!" he muttered, cold drops of perspiration standing out like beads on his perturbed brow. "Little Rhoda Cairn dead on her mother's grave! Heaven, how pitiful! She was so young to die!"

Then he knelt down beside her in the thick, wet grass, and placed his hand over her heart in the wild hope that a spark of life might yet be there.

## CHAPTER XL.

WITH bated breath, Mark Evans, the station-master, knelt down in the dew-wet grass, and placed his hand over the girl's heart. Although the sweet white face upturned to the gray morning light was as white as death, he cried out sharply to himself,—

"Her heart still beats! Heaven be praised! There is life in her yet!"

Gathering her in his arms, as though she were a little child, he carried her quickly across to the station, and placed her upon a rude bench. Once there, he could control himself no longer. He dropped upon his knees beside her, burying his face in the folds of her wet dress, chafing her hands, and sobbing as though his heart would break.

He had loved the girl lying there so stark and motionless as he had never loved anything in his life before; but he had never dared to tell her of it. Though he was station-master, and she a telegraph operator, she seemed as far above him as the star is from the earth.

She was so young too! He had often said to himself that he would bide his time before telling her his hopes and dreams. He saved his money, denying himself every little comfort, buying at length a little dream of a cottage that nestled, half hidden by the lilac bushes, down at the end of the lane. He obtained leave of absence to go to the city to make purchases for it. Then, when all was complete, he had planned how he would take Rhoda Cairn past it, and shock her by telling her that it belonged to him.

His next words would be: "Will you share it with me?" He had watched her sweet young face bending over her work until the train bore her out of his sight the day she left for Brighton, little dreaming under what conditions he was to see her again.

"She has gone on her vacation," he said, wiping the cold moisture from his brow. "She will soon return. Let that one thought comfort me."

Then came the terrible story in the newspapers. It nearly took the poor fellow's life as he read it. Then came a telegram from headquarters: If the girl should ever return, and ask for her old position, he, the station-master, was to curtly refuse her.

Mark Evans set his lips tightly together, laid his head on his arms, and suffered in silence the greatest sorrow he had ever known. Would she ever come back! The moaning winds, that blew dimly around the station, made him no answer.

When her mother died without her daughter's return, he gave up all hope; but as day by day, week by week rolled by, his heart grew heavier and heavier. What his emotions were now, to find her thus, can better be imagined than described.

For a moment Mark Evans had almost lost control of himself; then he remembered how horribly cold she was, and he had the presence of mind to start a fire in the waiting room.

The grateful heat that rose from it quickly brought the breath of life to the girl's white lips. The great dark, sombre eyes opened wide, and she saw the rugged, kindly face of the young station-master bending over her.

"I found you—you had fainted in the graveyard," he said. "Luckily enough, I was just passing, and I brought you here."

"Oh, why didn't you let me die!" moaned the girl, so bitterly that he was shocked.

"It is very wicked to talk like that," he said, forcing down the great jump that rose in his throat.

"No!" she cried, vehemently. "How could it be so very wrong to leave a great, cold, cruel world in which nobody wants you. I have nothing to live for."

"But somebody does want you, Rhoda!" cried the great rough fellow, with tears that were no disgrace to his manhood coursing down his cheek. "I want you with all my heart!"

"Hush, hush, Mark!" she cried; "you must not talk so to me," she cried. "Don't say any more. It can never be. You do not know all."

"Yes, I do," he answered, quickly. "I read in the newspapers of all that has happened since you left, and it almost broke me up. If you had not come back, just as you have, I would have thrown up my job and started out in the great world to search for you."

"Hush, Mark, hush!" she said; but he went on the faster:

"Do not say me nay. Give me the right to protect you, Rhoda. We can go away from this village. I can get a job on the road anywhere along the line, I will work for you, and tend to you so very carefully that you will forget the past."

She only turned away from him, pleading with him for the love of Heaven to say no more. He stopped short, looking at her gloomily. He had used all the words that he could command, and they had been of no avail. She would not even listen.

He put his hand heavily on her shoulder, saying in a hoarse, low, labouring breath:

"Surely you do not love that scoundrel who lured you on to your undoing; do you, Rhoda Cairn! You must speak, you must answer me."

The dark head sunk until her white, anguished face was almost hidden from his eager gaze. Her lips moved, but no sound issued from them.

(To be continued.)

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING.—When the proprietors of an article of consumption are prepared to send over 1,000,000 free sample tins to those who send a postcard it is fair to assume the vendors must themselves have a pretty good opinion of their speciality; and when, in addition, they possess sufficient courage to "put up" £5,000 in hard cash to pay for postage of samples it must be evident they have satisfied themselves they possess a good thing, and that it is better to demonstrate practically at the breakfast table than to depend upon mere assurances by advertisement. Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa, Ltd., 60, 61 & 62, Bunhill Row, London, E.C., are sending daily free sample tins of their special preparation to the public, and as a result the sales are going up by leaps and bounds. This style of advertising has the merit of honesty, and that the public appreciate it is shown by the statement that Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa can now be obtained from grocers, chemists, and stores everywhere, and the trade are unanimous in saying that no preparation of a similar character has ever given equal satisfaction to their customers. To obtain a tin it is only necessary to send a postcard, and the name of the LONDON READER should be mentioned.



## FACETIE.

WOMAN LAWYER: "How old are you?"  
Woman Witness: "I think I must be about your age."

UNDERTAKER (to gentleman): "Are you one of the mourners?" Gentleman: "Yes; he owed me £500."

WIFE (enthusiastically): "How much do you think we took in at the bazaar?" Husband (quietly): "How many, you mean?"

TEACHER: "Have you learned the Golden Rule, Tommy?" Tommy: "Yes'm. It's to do to other people like they would do to you."

"Who was that man to whom you bowed just now?" "I can't remember what his name is, but it seems to me I used to be engaged to him."

HE (at dinner, to his young wife): "My dear, I'm afraid your cook-book must have some misprints in it!"

CALLER: "Is Mrs. Wicks at home?" Bridget: "No, mum." Caller: "Oh, I'm very sorry." Bridget: "So am I, mum; but she's really out this time."

GROCER: "Well, little one, what can I do for you?" Jenny: "Please, sir, mamma says to change a half-crown for her, an' she'll give you the half-crown to-morrow."

MATILDA: "Have you spoken to papa?" Bertie: "Yes. I asked him through the telephone, and he answered: 'I don't know who you are, but it's all right.'"

PAMPERED NOODLE (who thinks all the girls are after him): "Yes, Miss Brightly, it costs me a thousand a year to live." Miss Brightly: "Oh, do you think it's worth it?"

FLORA (at the theatre): "Don't you think women can do a great deal to elevate the stage?" Ed.: "It wouldn't be necessary if they'd lower their hats."

"The trouble with the advanced woman," says the Wise Man from Birmingham, "is that she thinks she is 'advanced' when she is only 'forward.'"

ATTORNEY (sternly): "The witness will please state if the prisoner was in the habit of whistling when alone?" Witness: "I don't know, I was never with the prisoner when he was alone."

TIMMINS: "I have never been able to make up my mind whether I am a genius or not." Simmons: "It is easily tested. Just act like a hog when you are in society, and if you are a genius people will admire you for it."

"Yes," said the man, "I realise that cycling is a great thing. I used to be sluggish before the cycling craze, but now I'm spry and energetic." "I didn't know you rode." "I don't; I dodge."

"Well," said his wife to the canon, who had been asking for a bishopric, just as he alighted from the London train, "are you the appointee?" "No, I am the disappointed," said the neglected divine, gloomily.

"I cried all day yesterday." "What for?" "It was our wedding anniversary, and Henry said: 'It seems to me that something awful occurred ten years ago to-day, but I can't remember what it was.'"

PEDDLER: "Wouldn't you like some mottoes for your house, mum? It's very cheering to a husband to see a nice motto on the wall when he comes home?" Mrs. De Jagg: "You might sell me one if you've got one that says 'Better Late than Never.'"

"Mike," said the police-inspector, "there is a dead dog reported in Blank street. I want you to look after its disposition." An hour later the intelligent subordinate telephoned: "I have inquired about the dog, and find that he had a very savage disposition."

SEN: "How is it you were not at Westend's reception?" He: "I stayed away on account of a personal matter." She: "May I ask what it was?" He: "Will you promise to keep it secret?" She: "Yes." He: "Well, they failed to send me an invitation."

MRS. BETTERHAWSE: "I am told that you allow your husband to carry a latchkey." Mrs. Graymair: "Yes, but it does not fit the door. I just let him carry it to humour him. He likes to show it to his friends and make them think he is independent."

"WHY do they call it football?" asked the old lady who did not understand the game. And the cynical man, whose college days have become merely a memory, answered: "It's because they carry the ball under their arms and kick each other."

"I HAVE been complimented a great many times on my stage presence," said the amateur with a disposition to play Hamlet. "Yes," replied the weary manager, "you're all right on that point. What you want to cultivate now is an occasional stage absence."

DOCTOR: "You ought to take that child into the country for several weeks every summer." Mother: "Oh, doctor, I'm sorry to say we are not rich enough." Doctor: "Well, then, have her sent by a fresh-air fund." Mother: "But, doctor, we're not poor enough."

NEWBOY: "I say, there's two women fightin' down the street." P.-C. X 888: "Mind your own business, ye little rascal!" Newboy: "That's all right, but one of the women is yer wife." P.-C. X 888: "Then Heaven help the other one!"

SUITOR (who has just been caught by paterfamilias in the back parlour holding his daughter's hand): "My—er—dear sir, I've come here for the express purpose of asking you for your daughter's hand." Paterfamilias (acidly): "And I, my dear sir, think you're a fool for asking for what you already have in your possession."

SHE never sing: the old, old songs  
She shrieked in days of yore;  
She never thumps the keyboard now  
Until her thumbs are sore.  
Alas! upon the latest grand  
She never more will play:  
She falled with the instalments, and—  
They've taken it away.

MRS. BLOCKLEY: "John, do you know that Royal Worcester vase I bought yesterday for a pound? Well, they reduced them to ten shillings this morning." Mr. Blockley: "Then you are ten shillings out of pocket by not waiting until this morning!" Mrs. Blockley: "No; only five. I went down to-day and bought another one for ten, making two of them averaging fifteen shillings each."

TEMPERANCE MAN: "My friend, what I want you to do is to throw your whisky bottle into the sea." Old Tober: "I did that once, but the waves floated it back to me, and I said to myself if the laws of nature worked that way I want to blame for takin' the bottle again, and—" "Ah, but the bottle you threw away was empty. Throw it into the sea when the bottle is full of whisky, and you'll find the laws of nature are all right."

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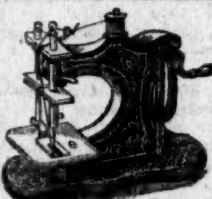
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## SOCIETY.

PRINCESS BEATRICE will pay visits to Genoa, Milan, and Venice during the Queen's stay at Cimiez in the spring.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS CHARLES OF DENMARK have left Appleton, their residences near Sandringham, for the season, and will spend the next few months at Copenhagen, returning to England at Whitstable.

THE rumour is current in Rome that the Count of Turin is about to be betrothed to a German Princess, one of the Bavarian Royal House, as the wife of King Humbert's nephew must be a Roman Catholic.

THE Queen will continue in residence at Osborne until towards the close of next month, and will then come to Windsor for a short stay before going abroad.

THE sanitation question having been satisfactorily settled, it appears practically certain that March will see the Queen once more installed in the Excelsior Regina Hotel at Cimiez for her Majesty's annual rest and change.

THE Shah of Persia's horses are made unusually conspicuous by having their tails dyed crimson at the tips, for a length of six inches. Only he and his sons are permitted to thus ornament their horses.

PRINCESS CHRISTIAN with Prince Christian are to be the guests of the Prince and Princess of Wales at Sandringham for a few days during the second week in February.

THE Duchess of Albany and Princess Alice are to stay for two months at the Villa Nevada, coming back to Claremont at the beginning of April, just before the Easter holidays begin. The Duchess will spend next summer in Holland with her sister, the Queen-Regent.

LITTLE Prince Edward of York has now grown quite accustomed to the camera, and always poses himself when he is taken alone. Of course, when his small brother and sister are included in the picture, Prince Edward has to be placed according to the movements of his restless juniors. Little Princess Victoria, by the way, is a very lively and bright baby, and a tremendous pet at Sandringham. She is like her elder brother in disposition and temperament, Prince "Bertie" being a more sedate child.

THE Duchess of Connaught's latest evening toilette is charming; the skirt is quite a modern style, and is both graceful and becoming—it falls with gathered fulness behind, while the front breadth is arranged with a fold down the left side. The skirt is quite plain at the right side, where it is seamed to the first side gore. The bodice is made over a lining foundation, which is shaped with a darts front and side piece sections. The back is cut round at the neck behind, and the material back pleats to lining at the waist in centre, fastening in the centre of back. Ornamental epaulettes trim the top of sleeves, frilled with chiffon and covered with passementerie, and a folded band, with oval passementerie, finishes the waist. It is made up in fine cardinal velvet.

THE Duke and Duchess of York lead a very quiet and simple life at York Cottage, Sandringham. It was originally built as a bachelors' retreat for the Princes Albert Victor and George, and was considerably enlarged after the Duke of York married, when it became his country home. The income of the Royal pair is not a large one, when the demands which their position make upon it are considered; so that the Duchess finds the practical training in house management which she received at White Lodge of great use. Her Royal Highness personally overlooks the *ménage* at York Cottage, while the Duke of York is equally energetic in the management of outside affairs. He may frequently be met in a morning riding round the estate on his bicycle and taking note of things after the manner of other country gentlemen. The Duke is a keen sportsman, and the Sandringham woods afford him plenty of opportunity for shooting.

## STATISTICS.

DURING last year British postmen delivered more than 3,000,000 letters.

THERE are said to be 150,000 survivors of the Aztec race in New Mexico.

ENGLISHWOMEN are, on the average, two inches taller than American women.

TAKING the average depth of the ocean to be three miles, there would be a layer of salt 230 feet deep if the water should evaporate.

GREAT BRITAIN has a longer sea-coast line than any other nation in Europe. It measures 2,755 miles, with Italy second, 2,472 miles. Russia ranks third and France fourth.

RECENT statistics show that under 15 years there are more boys than girls, but over 75 years there are more women than men, and from the ages of 90 to 100 the proportion is about 3 to 2 in favour of the women.

## GEMS.

IF Truth be lost in a well, Charity is certainly found in a pump.

THE shallow-minded are often dull because they do not find others as frivolous as themselves.

Men are often thought proud and ostentatious because their accusers would be so if they occupied their places.

THE origin of impertinence is not to have cultivation enough to speak well or judgment enough to remain silent.

EVERY promise we break makes a weak place in the self-respect which is our strong defence against the existing evil of life.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

MAITRE D'HOTEL BUTTER.—Put two tablespoonfuls of butter into a bowl; beat to a cream, adding gradually the juice of half a lemon, then stir a tablespoonful of parsley, chopped fine. Stand away and serve when cold.

GRILLED HAM.—Cut some cold boiled ham in nice uniform slices, season them highly with cayenne and mushroom catsup, and broil about one minute on each side, just enough to warm through, and serve immediately.

APPLE PIE.—Peel sour apples and stew until soft, and not much water is left in them. Rub through a colander. Use three eggs for each pie. Put in proportion of one cup of butter and one of sugar for three pies. These pies are best seasoned with nutmeg.

SPONGE PUDDING.—The yolks of three eggs, four tablespoonfuls of flour, one-and-a-half pints of milk and a little salt. Stir the milk, scalding hot, into the flour, and then the yolks. When ready to put into the oven add the whites beaten to a froth; bake half an hour; serve immediately.

CREAM OF WHEAT PANCAKES.—Beat yolk of one egg and piece of butter size of walnut; add two cups of milk. Heat in double boiler, and stir in slowly scant half cup of cream of wheat. Stir until thickened; then take from fire, and, when partially cool, stir in white of egg whipped, tablespoonful of baking powder, and half teaspoonful of salt.

CHEESE FINGERS.—One cup flour, one cup grated English cheese, one-quarter teaspoonful baking powder, two teaspoonfuls salt, one-half teaspoonful cayenne. Stir the flour and baking powder together. Add the cheese and seasoning. Mix with cold water to a stiff dough. Roll out very thin, cut in strips, and bake in a moderate oven till golden brown.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

A PEN carrying a small electric lamp to prevent shadows when writing has been patented in Germany.

TOMATOES have been grafted upon potatoes by a French experimenter, whose hybrid plant produces tubers underground and tomatoes above.

THE greatest height ever reached in a balloon was 26,160 ft.; two of the three aeronauts who made this ascent were suffocated.

SOME wonderful stalactite caves have recently been discovered eight miles from Krugersdorp, in the Transvaal.

COURT chaplains, when they preach before the German Emperor, must condense their sermons so that they can be delivered in fifteen minutes. Long sermons, he says, make him weary.

THE smallest horse in the world is said to be a Shetland pony, only twenty-four inches high. When standing beside its owner, the pony's back is only an inch above his knee.

IN birds the organ of sight is highly developed. British naturalists declare that the kestrel is possessed of such wonderful powers of sight that it is able to see a mouse when it is itself at such height in the air that it is invisible to the naked human eye.

THE latest thing in street paving is to put a layer of expanded iron on the ground and spread a layer of concrete over it, and then asphalt over the concrete. The idea is that the expanded iron prevents the pavement from sinking.

THE plume of the Prince of Wales worn on state occasions is worth £10. The feathers are pulled from the tail of the ferret, one of the rarest and most beautiful birds of India. Great expense and trouble are necessary to capture the bird, which is found only in the wildest jungles.

A SINGULAR custom prevails among the Tartars or Kurds. If a man gets into difficulties, i.e., loses his cattle or other movable property, he pours a little brown sugar into a piece of coloured cloth, ties it up and carries one such parcel to each of his friends and acquaintances. In return he is presented, according to circumstances, with a cow, or sheep, or a sum of money. He is thus at once set on his legs again. The same method is adopted when a young man wishes to marry, but is not in a position to satisfy the parents of his intended bride in the matter of the "Bashlyz," i.e., marriage dowry. Only in this case he does not go round himself, but sends a friend or a servant.

THE primitive Kanaka home is made of grass. There are many grass houses left on the islands. Surrounded by broad leaves, bananas and blooming magnolias, they are charming and picturesque. Here the male inhabitants recline in the shade throughout the heat of the day, while from the doorway peep forth the laughing eyed, dusky maidens, shy, yet ardent and coquettish in their coyness. The home is very simple, but at the same time neat. The houses are without any means of heating or cooking. The former is never necessary, and all cooking is done in the imu, or pit dug in the earth, where the pig, fish and beef are baked with heated stones, while the boiling is done in pots over a campfire near the building.

THREE miles from the village of Kriuvik, in the great volcanic district of Iceland, there is a whole mountain composed of eruptive clays and pure white sulphur. Although the sulphur mountain is a wonder in itself, interest centres to that spot on account of a beautiful grotto which penetrates the western slope to an unknown depth. The main entrance is a fissure-like chasm, about 60 ft. in height, and only 8 ft. or 10 ft. in width. The floor inclines for the first fifty or sixty yards, and then suddenly pitches downwards, seemingly into the very bowels of the earth. Here the fissure widens into a considerable cavern, with walls, roof, floor, stalactites and stalagmites, all composed of pure crystallised sulphur.



## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**LIL.**—The third finger of the left hand.  
**L. L.**—You must give six months' notice.  
**BEATIE.**—That might possibly be sufficient.  
**E. B.**—We neither give addresses nor reply by post.  
**P. S.**—You would inherit the whole of her property.  
**L. A.**—Laurence may be properly used as a Christian name.  
**F. H.**—You must remove at the expiration of the notice.  
**ROSEIE.**—Greeks and Romans had games resembling football.  
**TED.**—A game of cards or stakes in a private house is not illegal.  
**ARTHUR.**—Enquire at the County Court office of your own district.  
**HAR.**—Greta is in Dumfriesshire, not within the Scotch Border.  
**D. D.**—Place yourself in communication with some music publisher.  
**ROBERT.**—Your fiddle may be worth from 25s. to 30s. according to tone.  
**EVANGELINE.**—It does not appear in all editions of Longfellow's works.  
**CONSTANT READER.**—Do not undertake the journey at this time of the year.  
**W. K.**—It belongs to the firm, the consent of both partners is necessary.  
**OLD READER.**—You will find a number of addresses in the London Directory.  
**D. M.**—We have never come across any work wholly devoted to the subject.  
**COOKIE.**—Boiling meat is less wasteful than baking, and baking less wasteful than roasting.  
**S. O.**—Marriage with a deceased wife's sister is not legal in any part of the United Kingdom.  
**U. S. A.**—There are two mails a week to America from Liverpool—on Wednesdays and Saturdays.  
**R. G.**—The information can be obtained at the Registrar's General's Office on personal application.  
**FOLLY.**—You will find that lemons are improved and kept fresh by keeping in cold water until ready for use.  
**UNKNOWN.**—"Worth," in proper names, such as Kenilworth, &c., signifies that the place stands upon a tongue of land.  
**HUBERT.**—The Greek word from which "cathedral" is derived means "a seat." It implies the see or seat of a bishop.  
**W. M.**—It may be as much the fault of the employer as the employed. Servants do not generally quit good mistresses.  
**EMMA.**—It would be wiser to take to the dyer or professional cleaner, who will say at once if it can stand the cleansing.  
**QUERENT.**—We believe there is no rule of the post-office against the delivery of letters addressed to initials at a private house.  
**V. C.**—Parliament has met on Sunday eleven times, the first in the reign of Edward III, the last at the death of George II.  
**PAUL.**—Situations on railways are difficult to obtain, unless you have interest with some of the directors, or one of the managers.  
**J. M.**—Prince George was elected King of Greece on March 18th, 1865, and landed at Athens on November 2nd of the same year.  
**CORRESPONDENT.**—A woman who will give a good character to a dishonest servant is guilty of a very serious breach of good faith.  
**ENTERPRISING.**—Take our advice and direct your thoughts to some pursuit or business that offers a more reasonable chance of success.  
**R. G.**—We have no means of knowing what are the ingredients of the preparation you mention. It is possible that it is a patented article.  
**G. G.**—Bananas are not usually cooked at all, just eaten ripe; they make nice fritters but they are best raw; they are a capital feeding fruit.  
**IONOMANT.**—The former is unquestionably correct, although usage has made the other so familiar that many people imagine it to be correct.  
**TOM.**—In the eleventh century Sandwich was the most famous English seaport. It is now, however, two miles inland, owing to the sea receding.  
**K. N.**—It is a mere matter of fancy. One need not proclaim it, neither should it be kept a secret if there is likely to be any injurious consequences.  
**ROUTINE READER.**—The word "publiion," as used in the Bible, signifies a "tax-gatherer," and became a term of reproach, as the taxes were unjustly apportioned and cruelly raised.  
**CONSTANT READER.**—Mistletoe grows principally upon oak and apple trees. The berry, which is poisonous, is placed by birds in the bark, and takes root there. It is largely grown in the forests of France and Germany.

**H. D.**—All that would be necessary, if the due execution of the will came to be disputed, would be to prove the handwriting of the deceased witness.

**GUINAVERR.**—Do not do anything hasty whatever you do. It may be your Prince Charming is even now on the way, and that you will meet ere long.

**INTERESTED.**—Typewriters were invented twenty-five years ago, but in 1714 a patent was obtained for a machine that "would write print characters."

**D. L.**—Washing the face with a white flannel washing thoroughly removes dust and grime, and aids materially in keeping the skin soft and velvety.

**V. G.**—You are too old to enter the Royal Navy. Naval cadets are not admitted after the age of thirteen. You might obtain employment in the merchant service.

**JIM.**—Repeat your request to the High Commissioner for the Dominion of Canada, Victoria Street, Westminster, London. If there is such an institution he will be able to tell you.

**ALICE.**—You can clean gloves with benzine, but it is not very satisfactory. The cheapest way in the end would be to send them to a good dyer, who would clean them for a few pence.

**MOULDY HEAD.**—There are many remedies advertised to cure this complaint in your plants, but we think the most efficacious way is to occasionally sponge the leaves with lukewarm water.

**P. E.**—In this case, we should strongly advise that you should thoroughly understand each other, and by far the best course, in this matter, is for each to yield and agree to let each follow their own bent, and to promise faithfully never to broach nor discuss religion, politics, nor gossip of your neighbours.

## SOMEBODY'S CHILD.

Just a picture of somebody's child—  
 Sweet face set in its golden hair  
 Violet eyes, and cheeks of rose,  
 Rounded chin, with a dimple there:

Tender eyes where the shadows sleep,  
 Lit from within by a secret ray;  
 Tender eyes that will shine like stars  
 When love and womanhood come this way;

Scarlet lips with a story to tell—  
 Blessed be he who shall find it out!  
 Who shall learn the eyes' deep secret well,  
 And read the heart with never a doubt.

Then you will tremble, scarlet lips;  
 Then you will crimson, loveliest cheeks;  
 Eyes will brighten and blushes will burn  
 When the one true love bends and speaks.

But she's only a child now, as you see,  
 Only a child in her careless grace;  
 When love and womanhood come this way,  
 Will anything sadden the flower-like face?

**WIDDER.**—You might try a paste mixed with a little water, composed of two parts carbonate of soda and one part each of finely-powdered pumice and finely-powdered chalk; rub well, and repeat, if necessary; then wash off with soap and water; finally with clean water. You can replenish with oxide of tin and water, using a soft rag for rubber.

**G. M.**—The Hawaiian Islands were discovered by a Spanish navigator, in 1542. The independence of these islands was recognised by the United States in 1890, and more formally in 1843, by Belgium in 1844, and by England and France later in the same year. The United States Government is now desirous of annexing the islands.

**O. H.**—Vermicelli is a dried paste manufactured chiefly in Italy, in the form of smooth round strings. The name has been given to it in consequence of its worm-like appearance—*vermicelli* in Italian signifying "little worms." Macaroni is made of the same kind of paste as vermicelli, and in a similar manner, but is larger in diameter, and hollow, like the stem of a tobacco pipe.

**CATHERINE.**—Pour boiling water on the berries till covered; mash them thoroughly, and let stand for three or four days till a crust is formed; draw off the fluid into another vessel, and add a pound of sugar for every gallon; mix well, and let it work in a cask for a week or ten days so as to throw off any remaining lees, and to this end keep the cask filled; when the working has ceased bung it down for six months or longer.

**O. R.**—All the translators could do was to get at the idea suggested in the original, and put it into the most convenient English words; when fallies are used, the translators must be understood as saying "there is not a word exactly corresponding to this in the original, but it seems to us required to convey the original idea;" the Bible as it stands now is a faithful translation from the originals.

**SWEET TOOTH.**—Such a cake is very easily made at home, and is always very satisfactory, as home-cleaned fruit one fancies to be superior to any other: Take one-and-a-half breakfast cupsful of flour, and rub into it quarter-pound of either dripping or butter and half teaspoonful of baking powder; mix it to a firm paste with water, and roll it out into a thin sheet; grease the inside of a cake pan, and line it neatly with the paste, reserving a piece for the top of the bun; now put in

together in a large basin the following ingredients:—One pound flour, half-pound of sugar, two pounds of large raisins (stoned), two pounds currants well washed in cold water, rubbed dry and picked; quarter-pound orange-peel, quarter-pound almonds, half-ounce ginger, half-ounce cinnamon, half-ounce Jamaica pepper, half teaspoonful black pepper, one small teaspoonful carbonate of soda, one teaspoonful cream of tartar, and one small breakfast cupful of milk, or just as much as barely moistens it all; mix all thoroughly with the hands, and put the mixture into the lined tin, make it flat on the top, wet the edges round, and put on the piece of paper reserved for the purpose; prick it all over with a fork, brush it with a little egg, and put it in the oven for about two-and-a-half hours; the addition of a quarter-pound almonds and one pound additional of currants makes this a much richer cake, but the recipe given is a good plain cake.

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